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**THE LATER YEARS
OF CATHERINE DE' MEDICI**

ALSO BY EDITH SICHEL

CATHERINE DE MEDICI AND THE
FRENCH REFORMATION

(Being the Life of Catherine to the year 1562.)

Miss Sichel is an accomplished historian, who draws her characters with spirit and skill. Her volumes are the result of much diligent research, and the material is fully sifted and illuminated by a trained imagination. It is recognized by all critics that Miss Sichel's pictures of Catherine and the actors in the drama of which she was the central figure, are trustworthy transcripts of the life of the time. The story of Catherine is replete with sensational interest, and full justice is done to her character in Miss Sichel's volumes.



*Catherine de Médicis, en 1570
Bibliothèque Nationale.
from a Photograph by A. Grauden.*

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BUTLER & TANNER,
THE SELWOOD PRINTING WORKS,
FROME, AND LONDON.

W. & A. G. & C. 1884

PREFACE

THE second half of my study of Catherine de' Medici hardly seems to need any preface, and yet I should like to take the opportunity of once again defining the scope of my work. I can make no claim to figure as an expert historian. My aim has been no more than to paint portraits—to draw the central figure of Catherine as I see her, with such other persons in the drama as were interwoven with her destiny, standing out against a multi-coloured background and throwing strong shadows upon it. I have detected no error in accepted dates ; I have made no discovery of an actual fact. Yet the research into character may shed fresh light upon old events, may account for the unaccountable, and harmonize what is discordant. And the comments of contemporaries when read for themselves, apart from any larger historical purpose, acquire a new vitality. They sharpen our perception of detail, and give us that more personal aspect of the strange things that happen which often explains them. It is from this point of view alone that I venture to reproduce such famous catastrophes as the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Eve, or the murder of Henri, Duc de Guise.

Charity, which is understanding, is as needful for sound judgment of bygone generations as it is for our judgment of our neighbours. When men appear to us abnormally wicked, it is because we have not grasped closely enough the current standard of their morality. They only show black or white according as they rise or fall below the average line, and if they do not chance to possess some virtue upon which we pride ourselves, we may feel sure that they are rich in some other of which our age knows nothing.

Certain definable influences there were which went to make the gulf between them and us. That religion affords a capacious cloak for the human passions and foibles which would have existed without it, although under some other shelter, is a truth established since Churches began. But there is one quality

INTRODUCTION

peculiar to religion which, in the late days of the Valois, made much that seems impossible possible. For religion alone blinds people to the true nature of their motives and actions. It enables them to canonize their selfishness, their avarice, their ambition—often to believe, and to make the world believe, that their cruelty was holy zeal, their political greed spiritual energy.

Nor can we over-estimate the power of another kind of delusion—the incredible strength of a belief in the Divine Right of Kings, which convinced the Lord's Anointed that he was justified in any means he employed to preserve his sacred post. Superstitions are easy wear for sovereigns, and it took several revolutions to induce them to give up the faith in their own infallibility.

Here, in Paris, near the Louvre, beneath the window whence Catherine gave her fatal signal on the Eve of St. Bartholomew—whence she heard the first boom of the tocsin from Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois over the way ; or near that other window which looked out upon the fast crimsoning Seine—the deep river of many dead secrets—here, it is easier to feel the full force of the old conceptions which divide us from the past. And here, too, in the narrow, busy streets, it is easy to feel the force of insistent life, which loves and hates, and aspires, and fails, and tries again—the life of the mind and the heart, which, in spite of shifting forms, makes to-day one with yesterday.

PARIS,
October 28, 1907.

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CHAPTER I
Catherine and Alva

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CHAPTER I

Catherine and Alva

THE record of the years that passed in France between 1562 and 1589 is not an edifying record. For the final history of the Valois is that of the last Emperors of Rome, of the last Kings of Israel. Abnormal luxury, abnormal bloodshed, abnormal vice, and over all the lurid light of storm threatening judgment to come. The luxury of France was no longer the expression, however extravagant, of a generous and splendour-loving royalty exhibiting itself to the people; but a puerile outlet for decadent tastes; no longer a pageant of the Renaissance applauded by a festive nation, but a meaningless show wrung from a groaning populace. "Preposterous" is the only adjective which rises to the mind of whoever studies the doings of this distraught generation. They seem incredible to us of to-day. Yet we should do well to remember that nothing that has happened is impossible; that this is a fundamental law of history. And men and women must seem possible to themselves, for no one is a monster in his own estimation; his conduct and his actions are accounted for to himself as rational, or he would not be able to go on living. There have been victims of passion, of love, hatred, or ambition, who have known that they were committing abnormal crimes, but even they usually regard their deeds as logical; and when we deal with a day in which unscrupulous doings are constant, we may be sure that their perpetrators did not feel in signal disaccord with the current morality. Here we come to the real import of the matter, to the fact that is borne in upon us by this period. For where there is no morality, not even immorality, but only unmorality, there is no public opinion, and the death of public opinion is the most awful tragedy that can befall a nation. Such a tragedy had overtaken the French in the reigns of Charles IX and Henri III; had seared the whole nation, the Court, the inhabitants of Paris, the nobles outside it, the bourgeois and peasants of the provinces, demoralized by the horror of civil war. We have likened the

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story of these sovereigns to that of the Kings of Israel, but we do an injustice to the Hebrews. For their vices were those of reckless and primitive barbarians; of an incipient humanity among whom public opinion was as yet a power unknown. But the vices of France belonged to a polished and exhausted civilization, which deliberately murdered opinion and gave itself up to anarchy. Such a time makes the student thankful for the franker failings of the earlier half of the sixteenth century. They were the failings of the Renaissance, and sprang from the excess of positive qualities, of curiosity and enjoyment. The sun then warmed the land, and the vintage, though it may have made men drunkards, spread a glow through the veins of those who partook of it. But in these latter days enjoyment was wanting, and the senses themselves were cold while they wrought ruin.

It is almost an axiom that in every generation there exists a representative personality, one who sums up its qualities and defects, and is prominent just because he carries them further than his contemporaries—the voice, also the trumpet, of his fellows. Such an epitome of her age was Catherine de' Medici—“*la reine-mère, âme de l'État, elle qui est sans âme.*” But although from first to last this woman of no aspirations was ever of one piece, there may still be said to have been two distinct Catherines—the Catherine out of power, and the Catherine in power—the struggling woman and the woman satisfied. The first of these we have already attempted to portray¹; with the last, the Queen-Mother, the virtual ruler of France for nearly thirty years, it still remains to deal. This second Catherine dates from 1562, the year which finally changed and defined her attitude towards the Huguenots—the year of the Catholic victory of Dreux and of the Peace of Amboise, which gave away the cause of Protestantism. The earlier Catherine could hardly boast of attractiveness, but there hung about her the pathos of frustrated aims and starved affections—of the person who is in a great position, but is not prosperous.

About the second Catherine in the noontide of her power, the Catherine of St. Bartholomew's Eve, of the wars of religion, there is no pathos. She is interesting for other reasons. An enigma she remains, because a woman without a heart is enigmatic. To the problems still unsolved that her reign presents,

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to those involved in her attitude towards political parties, there is generally one answer—"Spain." In her panic fear of Philip II rests the clue to most of her ambiguities. Catherine, the woman of negations, unpopular, trammelled on all sides, could not dominate by personality. Her only chance of ruling lay in balance—and in mastering the art of balance to secure her own equipoise, in playing off one great family or party, if possible one nation against another, the rest of her life was spent.

In the year 1563, which followed the Peace of Amboise, the outlook of the Huguenots was none of the best. Havre, which with the help of England they had taken, was recaptured by Catherine—a great offence to the English. But Catherine, bent upon peace, had not long secured her prize when she made a conclusive Treaty with Elizabeth at Troyes. This was good for the national peace, but it prevented the French Protestants from claiming her as their separate ally. And there were other formidable anti-Huguenot influences abroad—conspiracies as well as compacts. Jeanne d'Albret had been cited before the Pope at Rome on the charge of heresy; she was secretly destined for the stake; her children were to be carried off by Spain, and it was for no lack of Papal energy that the plot failed. The Council of Trent, which had been called for the Reform of the Church, had been overawed by Spain; and the Papal Legates, who had arrived in the town, as a wit on the spot remarked, "with the Holy Ghost packed in their *Valises de Courrier*," had returned to Rome with those *valises* full of orthodox results. When, that same year, the Council came to an end—"all fine-looking flowers without fruit," as Catherine privately described it—the Pope was only found to be reinforced in his entrenchments. And the prospects of the opposite camp received a fresh blow next year in the death of Calvin, their only great dogmatic leader, the intellectual backbone of his party. Coligny, their military leader, could not safely approach the Court, for fear of the hatred of the Guises, and decrees of increased rigour were passed against his fellow-religionists.

Nor were the decrees unprovoked. The Huguenots had to be reckoned with. Although a party under clouds of misfortune, they were still a strong party determined to cope with their adversaries.

We catch confused glimpses, brilliant and sombre, of episodes in the drama—now of crimes, now of festivals. There was the assassination of Charry, a colleague of the Guises, who had

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murdered a certain Huguenot and was killed by the victim's brother—stabbed in Paris, in broad daylight, near the Pont Saint Michel. "*Souviens-toi*" were the only two words spoken by the avenger, before he moved away unmolested by the passers-by.

And there was the wedding, made for the pen of Dumas, of Coligny's brother, Andelot, with the bold Princesse de Salm, a signal event in the annals of the Huguenots, of which ample records remain. We can picture it as it happened, in the family Château at Nancy, facing the formidable Château of the Guises with only the river to divide them; the love between Andelot and his Princess, who swore that she would have none other as her husband; the stormings and pleadings of her orthodox kinsfolk, their urgings that her marriage would draw down the hatred of the Guises upon them all, the arrival of Andelot with his hundred men, the persistent refusal of Nancy to receive him. We can watch how he galloped unabashed to the walls of his lady's castle, although he knew the Guises were assembled in theirs; how he thundered forth an arquebusade at her door which shook his foemen's home across the river and made the coward Cardinal shiver amidst his cushions and his perfumes; how the bridegroom feasted bravely for three days under their very noses, and finally rode off on horseback with his bride, "*fière et pauvre*," *en croupe* behind him.

These events were the common talk, dangerous enough in a country where the smallest spark set all ablaze. Catherine, as always, fear-ridden, dreaded strong action before all else. She saw the imminent peril and took her usual measures to prevent it, directed by her familiar spirits of intrigue and ingenuity. Born theatrical manager that she was, as it well behoved a Medici to be, one of her plans was "to distract" the nation and to do so more sumptuously than usual. She devised two schemes, the first to hasten the coronation of Charles who only attained his legal majority when he turned fourteen, in June, 1563; the second to organize a Grand Tour for King and Court, a Royal progress through the length of France, which was to serve many purposes: to help her see the condition of the country for herself, to show the young monarch to his people, and to dissolve rebellion in State Functions. Both projects fulfilled her wonted method of killing two or more birds with one stone and concealed a second purpose of more importance than the obvious one. Charles IX was crowned on August 17, 1563, amid his nobles, the pompous periods of his well-

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conned oration flowing incongruously from boyish lips ; and with his formal accession, vanished the need of a Lieutenant-General. Condé's claim to the post was thus cancelled and an important source of Protestant influence cut away. Catherine had in so far thrown a sop to the Huguenots as to allow the office of Chancellor to Michel l'Hôpital, a fine statesman and a moderate Catholic of the Erasmian order—a courageous advocate of compromise and tolerance. His coronation speech, dealing with the religious difficulty, breathed the spirit of both these qualities and remains like a beam of light in darkness. Indeed, he suited Catherine's intellectual attitude, and, apart from political motives, she kept him for her own satisfaction.

Her second plan, the Royal Progress, had a more significant aim. The journey was to end at Bayonne, in a long-desired meeting between her and her daughter of Spain, whom she had not seen since her wedding, five years earlier. She also intended to propose certain royal marriages which would draw the two nations together. But this meeting was to cover another one, also long brooded over, with Philip the Catholic himself, a sinister meeting for the Huguenots, which had for its end the settlement of religious differences and the declaration of Catholic Uniformity.

The royal journey, which lasted some eighteen months, began in 1564. But before the Queen-Mother was launched on her final negotiations at Bayonne, she held two important audiences. The King was present on both occasions, but he only acted dummy at her side, although one of these interviews touched him nearly. It concerned his marriage, and was held at Bordeaux. Catherine was never anxious to be off with the old ally before she was on with the new, and she was eager to secure her relations with Protestant England before she formed fresh ties with Catholic Spain. Like most vacillators, she could on occasion be impudently bold, and, as a *tour de force* in the game of reconciliation, she had resolved to wed her son to Elizabeth, who was fully ten years older than he. In this determination Catherine exposed herself to defeat, erring, as she usually did, from lack of insight into human nature. Cynic that she was, she underrated the person she was dealing with, and she did not see that she was doing business with as great a trimmer as herself. Never, perhaps, have two such opportunists sat at the same time on rival thrones ; certainly never two such women. But Elizabeth was greater than Catherine, less personal. If she pursued a policy of expediency,

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it was for the glory of England, not for the aggrandizement of a family. And there was more method in her vacillations than in those of her "dear sister of France." She was now twenty-five years old, a Gloriana adored by her subjects, and not to be approached without some flattery.

Catherine's tone towards her was one of feline diplomacy. She had to meet divers inevitable difficulties urged by Smith, the English Ambassador. In spite of her casuistry, she never lost time in preambles. When he came before her and her son, she plunged *in medias res*. "The first objection you have urged," she said blandly, "is the age of my son. But if the Queen Elizabeth will put up with it, I will put up with the age of the Queen." The little King obediently repeated her last words. "I should be very glad," he echoed, "if your mistress would be as well pleased with my age, as I am well-pleased with hers." But there was a second objection, of greater importance in the eyes of Smith—that Elizabeth would have to live in France. Catherine waived that difficulty in the fashion of a true French autocrat. The Queen might have in her Court, she said, "a Lieutenant who would govern in her absence." "The English people," rejoined the British subject, "do not obey so easily and lieutenants are wont to grow insolent." The third objection was Elizabeth's fear of unpopularity. Catherine again showed her profound ignorance of aught but despotic rule, contemptuously remarking that the two nations together would be strong enough to counteract this evil. "My good sister, Elizabeth," she ended, "already calls herself Queen of France, but she is so only in name; then she would be Queen indeed." Smith turned to the King; "If you were but three or four years older, if you had but seen the Queen, and if you were really in love with her, I should not be astonished at this haste." "But, in good sooth I love her," the well-tutored boy exclaimed. "At your age, Sire," was Smith's answer, "none knoweth what love is; soon you will pass by that place, for every man passeth thereby, be he peasant or prince. Yet is it surely the maddest thing on earth, the most importunate, and that which hath least respect."

Smith spoke like a true Elizabethan. The boy's cheeks grew red at his words and his mother took up the cue. "His love is no mad affection," said she. "That I acknowledge," replied Smith, "but for that a love of such nature must rest upon grave reasons, and worthy and sober considerations, we must not go forward in this enterprise except upon ripe reflection."

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The rest of the interview passed in the discussion of dates, Catherine urging her desire to have a definite answer before her arrival in Bayonne, fixed for May 12, Smith dallying to gain time. Catherine made something like a Royal joke. May 23, she told him, was St. George's Day, the national Festival of the English, and if there were no delay, that date would see them under Queen Elizabeth's thumb.

For the moment, no more definite result was arrived at. Catherine sent next day again for the ambassador; she reopened the question—found fresh arguments in defence of the king's age, urging the instance of Cecil who had become a father at fourteen or fifteen. But Smith had gone as far as he was allowed, and Catherine's efforts were vain.

The other interview was an informal one (though none the less significant for that) with Alava, the Spanish ambassador, an old friend of Catherine's; and the king was again present at her side. Alava had been well primed by the powers at home; he was to act as a kind of advance-scout and discover what she meant to propose at Bayonne to his master. She had just given fresh cause of suspicion to Philip by publishing some decrees at Toulouse which allowed a certain latitude with regard to the keeping of Lent—a piece of politic pacification on her part, which Spain condemned as tending to heterodoxy. But if Alava was anxious to sound her, Catherine was as anxious to conceal her real intentions.

"You can speak to me of anything you like," she opened genially; "I shall not be angry with you." "Would to God that your Majesty might be angry," he retorted, "if only what I have to tell you could be of some service to your Majesties!" Charles turned to her. "Why talketh the Ambassador in this wise?" he asked. She explained the offence that she had given. The King "shrugged his shoulders and cast down his eyes"; he had no sympathy with lukewarmness or tolerance. "I hope," she took up with animation, "that this will not be made a pretext for putting off the meeting." "There is too much liberty given to heresy," was the only answer vouchsafed her; "when the wish cometh to repress it, it will probably come too late." "The Ambassador is but too much in the right," broke in the King, showing a will for the first time. "Remember, Madam, the Cardinal of Lorraine wrote to us to the same intent." "Heaven grant the meeting at Bayonne and all may be arranged!" prayed his mother. "Do you know," she demanded, with a sudden change of subject, "what cause

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hath retarded my daughter's departure ? " The envoy assured her that a rumour was abroad that the two great Huguenots, Condé and Jeanne d'Albret, were coming to Bayonne, and that this was the reason of the delay. She soothed him by affirming the contrary, saying that her one desire was to separate Condé from his party, above all from Coligny ; and that his master, Philip, could do much to help her. " What ought he to do ? " asked Alava. The King and his mother exchanged a look of understanding, and no more was said. Catherine enjoyed allowing foreign Ambassadors to get her to the brink of committal ; she enjoyed standing balancing herself, inducing them to think that they had caught her, and withdrawing to their discomfiture.

The young King, though dominated, almost hypnotized by his mother, was not a cypher and, unfledged though he was, already showed most of the characteristics which marked his later career. Sensitive, uncertain, excessive, now gentle, now violent, susceptible to beauty, with warm if spasmodic affections, there was in him much of the artist, much also of the madman. It is not surprising that he was inclined to be fanatical about religion, or that, like many other boys of fourteen, he should think heterodoxy absurd. And, like the people of Paris, he frankly hated the Huguenots as sour-faced precisians, who destroyed the pleasure and gaiety of life so dear to the hearts of Frenchmen. He was not too old or too refined to enjoy crude fun at their expense. There was an occasion when he and his brother Henri were staying with a cleric, the Chanoine de Mons, in whose house they found a Huguenot Catechism and a volume of the psalms of Marot and Béza. " They spent a good part of the afternoon in singing and preaching, the which they did in turn, first the King, then his brother, trying who best could counterfeit the Huguenot and his preacher." They reproduced looks, voices, gestures, to the great enjoyment of their mother, less so to that of the rest of the audience, which consisted of the Admiral Coligny and his two brothers, Anselot and the Cardinal de Châtillon. " Brother," exclaimed Anjou, snatching the catechism from his hand, " you know not how to be a preacher ; you do not pull the hypocrite's face in proper fashion ; let *me* try, and do you take your turn at the congregation, while I make the preacher's face. I do it better than you can." " And I much better than you," retorted the King. " But," continued Henri, " you do not turn up your eyes to heaven as if you saw a vision." " And you, my dear brother," said



CHARLES IX EN 1565
DESSIN—BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE.
D'APRÈS FRANÇOIS CLOUET.
From a photograph by J. Giraudon.

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Charles, "know but little about it. You do not stick out your ears so that they meet, or turn your head; for to be a good preacher you must join your ears more than your hands, just like a donkey, when some one desireth to load it with a heavy pack." "Well, brother," repeated Charles, "it still seemeth to me that I cut a better figure than you; but to settle the matter, whom shall we take as umpire, the preachers or the hearers?" This was something like a deliberate insult to Coligny and his brothers, and the Princes looked at them as they spoke, with a side glance at the Queen-Mother. "Let us first make appeal to the Admiral," said Anjou; "he knoweth the real thing full closely and can tell us something thereof." There was no love lost between the brothers, even in these early days. "*Hé déa!*" cried Charles, using the Spanish oath, "you have found a way out very quickly—do you perchance belong to their sect?" "Nay, I do not," rejoined Anjou, "but I know well enough what they know and the good face that they put on. It were meet you came to my school." And upon these words, joyously and with a good courage, he tore up the books of psalms and catechism and threw the pages in his brother's face. Then, as they raced round the room hurling paper at each other, "Ask Monsieur d'Andelot," shouted Charles, "if I make not the better preacher of the two." The Huguenot nobles were as much annoyed by this royal horse-play as they were meant to be, and it would have been well for them if Charles's bigotry had stopped with his youthful jokes.

The Court started for Bayonne with all its paraphernalia, and what with stoppages and functions at every town, it took many months to accomplish the journey. Its normal number was eight hundred souls, now swelled by many extra officials; the great Dukes of Nevers and Montpensier, each a king in his way, with his own Court, were travelling in Catherine's retinue, as well as Monluc, the old general of many battlefields, and other noble lords among the chiefs of Catholicism. Their baggage was no light matter, not to speak of the household stuff and the wardrobes of Catherine, the King, the Duc d'Anjou and, not least, of the Princess Margot, already the mirror of fashion. She had a playmate (if so innocent a word may be used about these little worldlings) in the young Prince, Henri de Navarre, one day to become her husband, now barely fourteen years old, an *enfant terrible*, a precocious wit, brilliant as the gallant boys of Shakespeare, in the exchange of repartee with his elders. This was a kind of sport

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much enjoyed by Catherine. She delighted in having him about her and he joined the Court on its way. Wherever the caravan went, flashed forth colour—nymphs in brocade, or without it, emerging from glittering rocks; shepherds and gods spouting pedantic Latin; poems and pasties alike doing honour to Kings and their Divine Right. Here and there we get more detailed impressions. At Bar-le-Duc the Queen presided at the christening of her grandchild, the baby born to her second daughter, Claude, the wife of the Duc de Lorraine; and applauded the elegant *mascarades* which Ronsard had rhymed for the occasion. At Maçon, in contrast to all the splendour, she was met by the austere Jeanne d'Albret and her twelve black-gowned ministers (who probably brought young Henri with them) and confronted by a fierce sectarian quarrel between the parents of the city as to whether the children of Protestants and Catholics might walk together in processions. And there were incidents on the road. Now it is a tragedy in the mask of comedy—the disgrace of a gay-hearted Court-lady, who had the indiscretion to be found out, and her instant immurement in a roadside convent where the light creature was left to await her heavy destiny, while the rainbow cavalcade which had been her only world passed quickly out of her sight. Now it is some business episode: the arrival of the couriers from Spain, the buzzing of secretaries, the despatch of the return messengers. Now again, the whole Court is snowed up for weeks of winter hardships and of infinite boredom. The Princess Margot thought that the cold had its moral advantages. "The bitter winter," she wrote in her reminiscences, "froze the rivers all through France; and, by the like means, it cooled men's minds and hearts, even the most quarrelsome among them."

At Lyons the welcome was resplendent. At Salon, the famous Nostradamus, once Catherine's favourite astrologer, came forth in his old age, infirm but courtly, to greet his royal mistress, and she, who never missed the chance of consulting her chosen science, made a stay there to take counsel of him.

The arrangements in Spain for the meeting at Bayonne had not by any means run smoothly. Philip, always suspicious of his mother-in-law, had been raising more than one difficulty. First he refused to come himself and decided to send Alva in his place; then he declared that his wife should not go, and could only with difficulty be persuaded into consent. Even so, he gave in with an ill-grace and would not allow new

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dresses for her suite. It was already February before it was definitely settled that she and the Duke of Alva should start for Bayonne.

It is but doing Catherine justice to say that the re-union with her daughter was an unfeigned joy to her. She was anxious to meet her as soon as possible on her way. "Yesterday," she wrote, "the Queen, my daughter, arrived at St. Jehan de Luz, where Monsieur my son, the King, and I had gone to await her, and this same day we have brought her to this city (of Bayonne) which fills us with all the happiness and pleasure you can fancy." The Spanish Queen's arrival at St. Jehan had, indeed, been brilliant. It was in Maytime. "Their Majesties of France," says an old chronicler, "having heard through Monsieur d'Orléans that the Queen of Spain was to cross the river which separateth the two kingdoms on the South, dined full early, and, straightway after dinner, they set off for this same river, adjoining the which they caused leafy bowers to be builded, about two leagues distant from St. Jehan de Luz; where they, being come, waited some two hours for her approach in a heat so desperate (*désespéré*), that five or six soldiers of Strozzi's troops died, suffocated in their armour. At last, towards two o'clock, the Court of the Queen was beheld drawing near, then the Queen-Mother, seized with a great joy, crossed the river and found herself face to face with her whom she had so long desired. Their salutations and embraces ended, they seated themselves in the boat and came to greet the King, who was expecting them on the shore. And when the boat was landed, His Majesty came on board accompanied by the princes of his house, and they made their salutations to the Queen without exchanging any kisses. And the troops of the Captain Strozzi gave forth a cannonade as furious as 'twas possible to hear, at the which the Spaniards were amazed. These ceremonies over, they all mounted on horseback and so came to sleep for that night at St. Jehan de Luz."

The Duke of Alva himself takes up the tale in a letter written to Philip. "They arrived here . . . and the Queen-Mother wished to put the Queen of Spain on her right hand, but the Queen refused, and turned red whenever her mother insisted. Madame Marguerite was waiting for her sister in the street at the door of the house where she was to lodge. . . . Her Majesty supped with the King, the Queen-Mother and her sister, and now they have all departed for Bayonne, where the reception will

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be for the Queen of Spain alone. . . . The Spaniards who accompany the Queen are exceeding courteous towards the Frenchmen and always yield precedence to them. We shall see what they will do at the Entry into Bayonne."

That Entry took place with great magnificence, the Queen of Spain riding between Monsieur d'Orléans and the Cardinal de Bourbon. A hundred gentlemen escorted her from the great gate of the town, where she was presented with its keys, to the house where King Charles was lodging ; and the chief citizens, robed in scarlet, bore her beneath a golden canopy to the Cathedral, where the priests made "*une musique romanesque*" for an hour, after which, amid blazing torches, she returned to the Royal palace. The Spaniards in her train, the French chronicler observes, were nearly all mounted upon miserable mules and hacks, and most of them carried their portmanteaux both in front and behind. And this, we know, was no accident, but a stroke of ill-humour on Philip's part—an insult to Catherine's Majesty, to punish her for gaining her point. The Spanish ladies were better equipped than these shabby Quixotes, and the twenty-five damsels and the troop of solemn matrons made a gallant show. There were presents from the king to his sister of Spain, a horse richly caparisoned, a saddle sown with pearls and precious stones ; there were tournaments and banquets interminable ; terraces cut in the turf ; choice dining-tables, each set for twelve, hidden in shady groves ; peasants dancing the dances of their *pays* and playing on the instruments in vogue there : "the Poitevines on their bagpipes, the Provençales on cymbals ; the Bourgingnones and Champenoises on little hautbois . . . and violins and village tambourines." And there were further feastings *à l'Espagnol*. For at this vital moment Spain ruled all the fashions, the literary fashions among them. The vogue for pseudo-chivalry, so prevalent earlier in the century, had passed away, and Ronsard composed Spanish Pastorals to celebrate the occasion.

The morning after this State-Entry, the Duke of Alva presented his letters of introduction, the King of France and Queen of Spain attended Mass, and the game began in earnest. It was a duel between Alva and Catherine, the two most experienced Reynards of Europe ; backed on either side by seconds—the Spanish Elizabeth on Alva's side, the little King on his mother's. The Duke of Alva was by now fifty-five years of age. Naturally tall, of a splendid carriage upon which he justly prided

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himself, his height was emphasized by his spareness. The hardships of his youth in the field had emaciated him. His cheeks were yellow, his face long and gaunt, his eyes, brown and piercingly keen, alone giving it life, while his long beard, now sprinkled with silver, added dignity and strength to his appearance. Antonio More, in his famous portrait at Brussels, has made us know Alva's mouth, its austere irony, its subtle cruelty, has transmitted the superb look of a man armed *cap à pié*, soul and body. Catherine was some ten years his junior, and had not changed much since she was thirty. She kept her veiled round eyes, her rather exotic complexion—"olive green" a contemporary called it—and her neutral-coloured hair, her full lips, her beautiful hands and her impressive presence; but she was growing markedly stouter and her gait was heavier than of old. Her eldest boy, dark, slender, Southern, did not resemble her, no more did her daughter of Spain. The Queen was the most attractive figure in the interviews which now began. Catherine had left her a child of fourteen; she found her a brilliant woman of nineteen, her angles rounded, her lines mellowed. We see her with the strange vividness with which we remember our last sight of one beheld for the last time—our vision made acute by the knowledge that when three years should have passed, death would have overtaken her. The small-pox which had stricken her when she first came to Spain had not marred her dazzling skin, nor the lustre of her black eyes and black hair, "which seemed like a shade unto her complexion." She was, Brantôme tells us, "taller than all her sisters, and her bearing had a grace compacted of the mingled grace of France and Spain." In her early girlhood her father, proud of her parts, had brought her up to be his political confidante and trained her in State affairs, so that when she came to a throne she played her part in them with credit. There seems to be no legend more untrue than that which makes her a miserable wife. She loved her husband who was devoted to her.

After his strange official marriage with Mary Tudor, the only person fit to compare with him in conscientious bigotry, the sparkling young French Princess must have seemed like a ray of light. And Philip, sombre, dreaded by all, probably more than any man needed sunshine, the sunshine that none had dared give him. Narrow, concentrated, grim, he was good to her as far as his powers went. His gloom may have dashed her spirits, but it did not affect her happiness, while his mind

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dominated hers and infused it with a fanaticism not unnatural to her. She became almost as fierce a foe of heresy as he, and "her lips, still childlike and made to smile," assumed, we are told, "a harsh vigour, directly there was mention of the religious troubles in France." Her mother saw this at a glance, and when her daughter first approached her on the subject she cut her short. "So your husband suspects me?" she asked. "Do you know that his suspicions will lead us straight into war?"

"What cause have you to think, Madam, that the King mistrusts your Majesty?" said Elizabeth with animation. "Only evil-minded people could give you such ideas." Her mother looked her straight in the face. "My dear daughter, you have become very Spanish," was her answer. "I am Spanish, I own it," replied the Queen with regal pride, "and in truth it is my duty to be so. But I am always your daughter, the same that you sent to Spain." The talk ran on, but they touched no more that day on religion.

Alva had a subtler policy than his pupil, Elizabeth. He and Philip had together concerted a programme, every detail of which they had discussed, and they were in constant communication. He meant to exact certain measures unconditionally: the immediate expulsion of the Huguenot ministers on pain of death, the prohibition of Huguenot services, the exclusion of Huguenots from public office. Catherine came with one resolve—to get peace for France, by fair means or foul, whether or no she had to buy it with promises (not made for keeping) of future hostility towards the Huguenots. But Alva meant to hide his cards till he had fully grasped the state of French affairs. He wished to make Catherine speak first, and this was what she meant him to do.

There were skirmishes before the battle. Alva had a clandestine colleague in Alava, the Spanish ambassador, and Alava was set to sound Montpensier. "The shortest cure," said Montpensier's mouthpiece, his Confessor, "would be to cut off the heads first of Condé and the Admiral, then of Andelot, La Rochefoucauld and Grammont."

Alva, the grim Inquisitor, knew well when and where to charm; perhaps no leader of men has really been without the art. He was acquainted with Monluc, the gallant old general—rough, simple, bigoted, and as vain as a child. When Monluc came to pay his respects, Alva embraced him "with effusion" before a group of courtiers and attendants, and as he did so, he whispered in his ear, "I am only here to learn

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from *your* lips the measures I ought to take on behalf of religion. Tell me the course I should pursue and the men I should trust." Monluc, whose pride it was to be thought a statesman, fell at once into the trap. "If my example had been followed in the last war, and no one's life had been spared, we should not be in these straits. If all good Catholics would but unite, there would not remain one soul to break bread with this dirty mob." And, in a lower tone, "I will send you a memorandum, but keep my secret. The Cardinal de Bourbon is a good Catholic, but the Queen-Mother turns him round her little finger . . . you may trust Montpensier, and also Damville and Sipierre." The eyes of the audience were upon them and Monluc could say no more. Alva lost no time in seeking the King. He paid him compliments, he asked after his health, he begged him not to exhaust himself by taking violent exercise. "God," said he, "hath seemingly preserved your Majesty to chastise the offences committed day by day against religion." The King, left to himself, would probably have agreed with Alva, but Catherine had drilled him efficiently. "I have no wish to take arms," he exclaimed—"it would be the ruin of my kingdom, as the late wars have proved." Alva knew who had taught him this speech; he pressed him no further, but he sharpened his weapons for Catherine. He knew he must attune her mind, and he sent the Queen of Spain to prepare the way for himself.

In spite of her mother's former rebuff, she was to reopen the subject of religion. "As you are so much afraid of war, why do you not avail yourself of the Duke's presence and come to some settlement with him?" she demanded of the French Queen. They were alone. "So be it," rejoined Catherine, "bring me the Duke." The next day Elizabeth presented Alva to her mother. Did these two wrestlers, strong, supple and cautious, look at one another before they closed in fight? Who can tell? Alva, at least, had taken his adversary's measure.

Catherine had all the doors of her apartments safely shut before she entered upon conversation. When she began to talk, it was "with incredible volubility, touching on one subject after another." The Duke became irritated and an impatient gleam came into his eyes. "I see," she said, "that you want us to arrive at religion." "I own it," was his answer—"it is the whole point of our discussion."

With the coolness which was her talent, she set about giving

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him a summary of events since the Peace of Amboise, and proved, according to her own text, that the state of France had steadily improved and was daily offering her fresh cause for hope. These conclusions he pushed away with contempt and proceeded to make his own statement of affairs. Catherine knew when to be feminine, and she let him have his say without interruption. "Well," she remarked when he had done, "you diagnose the disease very well. I entreat you now to tell me the remedy." But it was lost time to play the helpless woman, needing counsel, before Alva. He saw her game. A dialogue followed between them—a wary trial of their weapons. "But, Madam," he began urbanely, "who knows that better than you? It is for you to say what you desire to be done. I will undertake to transmit your wishes to my royal master."

"Your royal master knows all that happens in this kingdom rather better than I do. What means does he recommend to put the Protestants and rebels in their place? What would you yourself do in my shoes?" She had forced him into a tight place; he parried her question with another: "Has religion gained or lost since the Peace of Amboise?"

"It has gained."

"I cannot agree with your point of view, Madam; the policy of sustained dissimulation has hitherto compromised the cause of religion; there is only one thing left for you—to take strong measures."

"Then it is a recourse to arms that you are going to propose?" Catherine broke in with sudden vehemence.

"Arms for the moment would be useless; strong measures suffice. You must banish the whole evil sect from France—it is your son's only resource." Alva had raised his voice as he spoke. It was the moment for the Spanish Queen to take up her cue, probably prompted by him.

"If my brother, the King, is really as strong as you say, mother, why does he not chastise all those who are rebels against God?"

Catherine, as was her wont, did not answer—she turned towards the Duke, changed the subject, and broached a League with the Emperor Maximilian. Alva told her that this was impracticable, and Catherine adjourned the discussion.

She had, until now, concealed one of her aims in coming: the arrangement of a double marriage between the royalties of France and Spain—the surest way of all to cement the

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issue

alliance that she desired. It had long been her wish to wed the Princess Margot to Don Carlos, and the thirteen-year-old Duc d'Anjou to Philip's elderly sister, Juana, the widowed Queen of Portugal. These marriages now formed the theme of constant conversations with her daughter of Spain, whom she employed as ambassadress to Alva; and he, in his turn, used her schemes as possible thumbscrews by which to force her to take more decided steps against the Huguenots. Their second meeting was a failure, for the adjoining room was thronged with people, the door between the two apartments had been left open, and Alva refused to go on talking. But the day after, they held the most memorable of their colloquies, the privy council which set rolling the events that ended in St. Bartholomew's Eve. For there is little doubt that some pact was arrived at between them which affected Catherine's course in after years, though it did not directly cause her deeds.

*above
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The conference took place in the long, deserted Gallery of the Queen-Mother's palace at Bayonne. Outside was the blaze of a southern Midsummer, but the pillared corridor lay in deep shadow. The pair slowly paced its length, themselves like ominous shadows, Catherine in her trailing black robes, Alva in his sombre suit, both plunged in low-voiced conversation—enemies forced into a friendship bitterer than any hostility. The little Queen of Spain was present, but that day she played no prominent part. Some of their discourse is known. The royal marriages were first broached, Catherine brushing away the Duke's objections to them, and treating them as accomplished facts. Alva again urged the religious difficulty, but she cut him short, showing temper for the first time. "I have already said all that I have to say—I shall know of myself how to do justice," she replied.

"Meseems, Madam, you have grown colder since that first day when I spoke to you thereof."

"Meseems, sir, that you do not take my meaning."

As Catherine grew angry, Alva's calm grew more imperturbable. He told her that she could not do justice as long as justice passed through the hands of her Chancellor, Michel l'Hôpital. "It was His Grace's ill-will," she answered, "that prompted his ill-opinion—l'Hôpital was not so bad as he thought him."

"Can you deny that he is a Huguenot?" asked Alva.

"No, he is *not* a Huguenot," she exclaimed in loud tones.

"Madam," quoth the Duke with haughty coolness, "you

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are the only person in all France to think so." Here Elizabeth of Spain put in her word.

"Already in my father's life-time he passed for a Protestant," she said. "As long as he is Chancellor the Huguenots will be favoured and the Catholics oppressed. Why not send him awhile into retirement?" Alva interrupted his pupil.

"The Catholic King," he stated boldly, "wants to know whether or no you are going to remedy this religious business. Shall he count upon your son, the King, or shall he act by himself? To ascertain this is the only reason why your daughter has come to Bayonne."

"I have said all that I have to say," reiterated the Queen-Mother.

Alva tried a diplomatic diversion and began talking of the Council of Trent. But she turned the subject to her own uses and tried to put him off with a project for a Council of learned theologians who should resolve all knotty points. He twitted her with the failure of the Colloquy of Poissy. The Cardinal of Lorraine, she declared, had been responsible for that. "These questions are not matters of divine law, but of political expediency," she said. Alva was scandalized, and here the difference of the adversaries came out. It was a case of cynic and of fanatic—of no conviction and of ill-conviction, and ill-conviction came out strongest. They resumed a conversation the conclusion of which is not known. That the death of the Protestant chiefs, above all of Coligny, formed a main theme of their converse, is much more than probable. "The head of one salmon is worth the heads of a thousand frogs," were the words of Alva overheard by the little Prince of Navarre, as he lurked unseen in some alcove—unforgettable words, repeated by him in after days to his mother, Jeanne d'Albret. After all they told nothing new. The measure prescribed had been already advised by the Confessor of the Duke of Montpensier; and that the death of Coligny was now formally proposed, that henceforth the scheme simmered in the mind of Catherine, is no matter for surprise.

It is evident, too, from the letters of the moment that some definite arrangement was arrived at.

"The Duke of Alva," wrote Alava, "will inform His Majesty and your Lordships of the resolutions he concerted with the Queen-Mother; if they can only be realized there will be a great service done to God and to our Lord the King."

And writing to Philip, Catherine said—

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"The Queen, your wife, can tell you more fully what was settled; she can assure you of the goodwill and zeal that we bear towards religion and of our desire to see all things that will further the service of God (for which the reader may substitute Spain), a matter which we will never forget. And, in faith, we will take pains so to fulfil it so that He will be content, and that we shall gain the good we desire. Nor will I weary Your Majesty with a longer letter, assured as I am that the Queen, my daughter, will tell him of all the other subjects that we discussed together, for the preservation and increase of the friendship that is between us—subjects so privy that I durst speak them to no other."

But if the decisions here alluded to refer, as is most likely, to the murder of the Admiral and his comrades, it is equally improbable that they imply any plot for wholesale massacre. The attempt on Coligny, when it came, led to the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, by what means will be discussed in its place. But that any general slaughter was determined on by the chief actors at Bayonne, to be carried out seven years after, is a supposition out of focus; not the focus of their morals, which had no existence, but that of the shrewd over-practical sense which always guided them.

Against this conviction may be quoted the remarkable letter from Alva to Don Diego de Cúñiga, written some two weeks after St. Bartholomew's Eve, on September 10, 1572.

"Often times have I remembered what I said to the Queen-Mother at Bayonne, and what she then promised me. I see that she has thoroughly kept her word."

Yet if we shake off all sensationalism and look at this passage impartially, it does not of its nature imply more than the death of Coligny and his colleagues. Put the stress upon "thoroughly" and Alva's speech only means "she has more than satisfied us."

Many legends were current at the time. Corroero, the Venetian Ambassador, thought that a massacre had been resolved on, restricted to a definite list of victims; others, in old times and in new, have thought that the scheme was one of general slaughter. The chief document on which this belief was based was a despatch from Alava to Philip at the time of the Bayonne negotiations, the beginning of which has been already quoted. That experienced scholar, the Comte de la Ferrière, gives it "as it was originally translated." After the opening phrases

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concerning the debates of Alva and Catherine, "I feel anxious," he continues, "because of a certain perturbation that I sometimes see in her—for I knew well enough beforehand that the only proper course is to *smash these heresiarchs* and others who are such without the name."¹

But the Comte de la Ferrière goes on to tell us that, doubting if this letter were rightly translated, he sent it to an authority more learned in Spanish than himself. According to this student the despatch as here printed is wrongly rendered.

"The copy of the letter," says he, "is incorrect and the translation no less faulty. This is how it should run—

"I feel perturbed because I foresee that these *heretics* are going to *smash* her² and others who are heretics without the name."

There is, in this case, the difficulty of the pronoun referring to Catherine being *le* instead of *la*; also of the slightly strained meaning of the last allusion—to "the heretics who are heretics without the name"—which would here refer to the "*Politiques*" or Moderates, the party that sheltered heterodox opinions behind the semblance of professed Catholicism. On the other hand this reading is borne out by a passage in another of Alava's despatches belonging to this period.

"I am afraid," he writes, "that the heretics already at Court and those who will arrive there may cause a change in the Queen."

And the ultra-Catholic diplomat, Cardinal Granvella, in a letter to a Spanish friend, makes much the same statement in different words: "I believe her (the Queen-Mother) to be so strongly imbued with this idea that in coaxing both parties she has found the secret of consolidating her power, and that she will persist in this policy, from which the destruction of religion and of the throne and of her son must inevitably follow. I am fully persuaded that she will do no good, and I have only too many reasons to apprehend great disasters."

This conviction of persons behind the scenes that Catherine was more likely to act weakly towards the Huguenots than to plan a wholesale vengeance against them weighs heavily against the current traditions: against the Protestants' firm belief,

¹ J'éprouve des craintes pour le trouble que je sens qu'il y a parfois chez elle, parceque je prévois qu'on doit marteler ces hérésiarques et d'autres qui le sont sans en avoir le nom.

² J'éprouve du trouble parceque je prévois que ces hérétiques doivent le marteler (elle, Catherine) et d'autres qui le sont sans en avoir le nom.

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natural enough under the circumstances, that a plot was hatched against them at Bayonne ; against the view of the historian, writing a few years later, the famous de Thou. He believed in " a secret treaty concluded at Bayonne between the two kings, to restore the ancient religion and to annihilate the new one." But traditions too often only mean the things that are easiest to believe ; nor, we repeat, do they count beside the verdict of that best of historic tribunals—the tribunal of common sense.

The meeting with Alva in the gallery marked the crisis of events at Bayonne. There were other doings afterwards : a State Council to consider the royal marriages, which ended in smoke, Philip rejecting both proposals ; suave interviews with the Papal Nuncio, who now tried *his* intervention ; a decision to hold a theological Conference, which was bound to be useless, since all Huguenots were to be excluded from it and no doctrine was to be discussed. The real business was over ; it was time to depart.

Philip, whatever his feelings, pretended to be fairly contented.

" The Queen-Mother," he wrote, " has made up her mind to desire most sincerely the cure of the religious difficulty. And in the presence of some of her Catholic Councillors, the Duke of Alva and Don Juan Manrique, the persons she wished to be present, she promised the Queen, my wife, to remedy all this *as speedily as possible*. She declares she will put no delays in the way of a solution when once she has ended the journey now begun. The Queen, my wife, was satisfied with this resolution because we all clearly know that the day when she applies the cure, the trick will be done."

In August the royal train set out again much as it had come. The King accompanied his sister to the place where he had met her, on the river bank which marked the frontier line between the two kingdoms. Catherine went farther.

" My daughter, the Queen," she wrote, " parted from us on the third of this month. I went on the same day to sleep at Hiron that I might still have the joy of seeing her as long as I could. All through our interviews we talked of nothing but caresses and feastings and good cheer—and, in general terms, of the desire felt by every one for the continuation of the friendship between their Majesties. In sooth, the chief reason for the meeting was only to have this consolation—to behold the aforesaid Queen, my daughter."

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Whatever flights Catherine allowed her pen, the leave-taking showed real emotion.

"The adieux of the Queen of Spain to the Queen-Mother and the King were more heartrending than words can say," runs Alava's account to Philip. "There were floods of tears. The Constable came into the King's room and told him he must not cry because the foreigners as well as his own subjects might notice it, and a King ought never to cry. The King thanked the Constable, but he could not stop his tears. I reminded the Queen-Mother of the great risks that she and the King would have to run because the Protestants were persuaded that at this meeting it had been decided to chastise them; I told her she must be on her guard, as the good Catholics who had been surrounding them had already departed. And the Queen of Spain gave her the same counsels."

We do not know if the Queen of Spain shed tears like poor human little King Charles, who so soon learned his royal lesson and gave up the unkingly habit of grieving. Sumptuous, stiff pathetic, in the flower of youth and of etiquette, Elizabeth of Spain was borne away and vanished in the distance, followed by her jewelled ladies and ill-accoutred gentlemen; vanished never to be seen again by the eyes of her kindred, or of the world.

CHAPTER II

Coligny

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Coligny

THE period that followed the events of the last chapter was a crowded one. Catherine and Alva had played out their grim comedy at Bayonne, and the next seven years—between 1565 and 1572—were filled by a drama in which there were two leading parts, two characters who confronted each other upon the stage. The first was still Catherine de' Medici, the second was Gaspard de Coligny. They were opposing forces, and their struggle—it was a death-struggle—was one between indifference and conviction. In their attitude each towards the other, and each towards Spain, lies the key to the situation of France during this storm-rent time.

To do justice to this attitude, it is necessary to understand the character of Coligny. This is happily no difficult matter, for Coligny was not a subtle emanation of the Renaissance; he was rather a man of the Reformation, whose life is told, whose intellect is embodied, in his actions. Michelet has said that the personality of Coligny is the one ennobling subject of study in the France of the later Valois Kings; and, indeed, he stands out like a fir-crowned rock, rising steep and clear-cut from out mephitic vapours.

He was born in 1519, the same year as Catherine de' Medici. His father was the Sieur de Châtillon, who had married a widow, Louise de Mailly, born de Montmorency. Coligny's mother was his most important parent. She was the sister of the great Constable, Anne de Montmorency, the splendid and arrogant prince, the Renaissance barbarian, as courageous as he was despotic, who so long dominated the Court in the days of François I and Henri II. This uncle was a great factor in Coligny's life; the word of such a potentate was law, and his relations were bound to regard him with deference. His sister, Louise, had inherited the family character, though with her it took a grave turn, and mundane success was the

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last thing she cared about. She was a close friend of bold thinkers, like Marguerite d'Angoulême, the sister of François I, and of a confessed Protestant such as Michelle, Dame de Soubise, a light at the Calvinistic Court of Renée of Ferrara. Louise de Châtillon's sympathies were evidently with heterodoxy, but she herself seems to have been one of those broad Catholics—Evangelical Catholics they might be called—who were more or less inspired by Erasmus and could easily be taken for Huguenots, although they actually formed the "Extreme Left" of the Roman Church. Marguerite d'Angoulême was one of them: her Italian contemporary, Vittoria Colonna, was another. Basing their faith upon the Gospels, which they read for themselves, they urged a purer Christianity through stricter morals and ecclesiastical Reform, striving to reconcile old forms with new ideas.

To us of to-day, as we read about the past, the fresh wine and the time-worn bottles are easily separable, but they were not so then when beliefs were in solution. Marguerite d'Angoulême was summoned before the Sorbonne for heresy and took Communion in both kinds, yet died professing the religion she was born in. Louise de Châtillon probably did not go so far and seems to have indulged in no audacities, but she brought up her children in an atmosphere of a primitive piety and strenuous mysticism which were not without an influence on their after days. She had shown her religious tendencies in earlier years, when she had lived at the Court of Anne de Bretagne, where she was known for her goodness. "It is absolutely safe for your mother to descend into the innermost recesses of her conscience—she can look about her with confident eyes," wrote the Protestant-minded Chancellor, Michel de l'Hôpital, to the Cardinal de Châtillon. Nor is it without significance that her saintly granddaughter, Eléonore de Roye (born of Madeleine, Louise's child by her first marriage), became the wife of the Huguenot leader, the Prince de Condé, and figured as a power among them. Louise had four sons, Pierre—who died in his youth, Odet, who was early made a Cardinal, Gaspard, who thus, while still a boy, became the head of the family, and François, or Andelot, whose career seems almost one with that of the Admiral. For courage, for simplicity and heartwholeness, and for devotion to one another, history has perhaps nothing finer to show than these great brothers, bound together by their

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faith as well as by their love. "For, in sooth," says the old historian, "the unity of mind and charity and goodness that was betwixt the three, was such that they seemed a single soul."

Louise de Montmorency, like others of her way of belief, had a liberal thinker's taste for knowledge. Whether she herself was a scholar, like Marguerite d'Angoulême, does not appear. At all events, she chose a friend of Erasmus and of the heretical savant, Berquin, to act as her son Gaspard's tutor. This was Bérauld, an enlightened Humanist, who gave the boy a taste for the classics and became his friend as well as teacher.

He and his brothers had a master for the sword as well as for the pen. To be a man of the world was no light matter in those days, and required a training which began almost in infancy. Gaspard was a conscientious boy rather than a quick one, and more remarkable for the balance of his faculties than for their brilliance. His home education at the stern old family Château de Châtillon-sur-Loing only lasted till he was eleven; for in 1530 his mother was summoned to Court to officiate as lady-in-waiting to François I's second wife, Eleanor of Austria, and she took the lad with her. She must have had something peculiarly attractive about her, for the Queen, who was anything but grave, singled her out for intimacy and became a constant guest at Châtillon. These new interests, and the companionship of Marguerite with all that she brought with her of good company and of intellectual cheer, must have been some compensation for the loss of the seclusion that Louise liked best. Gaspard, at least, profited by his stimulating surroundings. He had lessons from skilled pedagogues—from Tagliacarne and du Maine, but his heart remained true to his first tutor. We have a letter of his to Bérauld, written four years after his coming to Court. He gives him news of the grand world—he has already become part of it.

"Gaspard de Coligny," it runs, "to Nicholas Bérauld, greeting. You want me to give you the news of the Court, although usually you detest asking about them. As for me, I am not accustomed to occupy my mind with such vast and strenuous matters; all the same, I am only going to listen to the affection which binds us two together, and to your most lawful desire. So I shall try to sum up for you as faithfully as ever I can, the knowledge I have been able to get

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first-hand and all that I have picked up from others. To begin with: no one has as yet asserted that the sovereign Pope is dead. All that is known for certain is that he is so ill that from day to day we expect to hear of his death. At Rome armed men are appearing here and there, some ready to plunder, others to defend their houses. Our Cardinals set sail from Marseilles on September 8. We believe that they have arrived in Rome and are already sitting in conclave. All sorts of grave complications are arising. The enemies of mankind and the enemies of France are ploughing the sea. Roman territory is a prey to warfare. . . . And yet in the midst of the doubt and anxiety that brood over all things, the King never allows his courage to be dashed. Far from it. As if he were inspired by some well-founded hope, he devotes every day to hunting, tires out the very stags, or, with a stroke from his own hand, finishes off the boars already taken in the nets. Sometimes I give myself up to the same kind of exercise, but the greater part of my time goes in reading Cicero and the Tables of Ptolemy under the guidance of du Maine, whose method is different from Tagliacarne's, and who adds cosmography to the rest, especially in such sections as deal with the longitude and latitude of places, as well as with meridians and parallels.

"There, you are in possession of all the affairs of the Court, so far as I know them. For your part, pray, if you will, tell me everything that is happening, whether in town, or in your home. Du Maine greets you a thousand times. Since I wrote this letter, the King has at last had certain news of the death of the Pope, which came to pass just when every one thought him on the road to recovery."

There are some men, whom History has wronged, or rather deadened, by sending them down to us as bronze monuments, cut all of a piece. Coligny is one of these. Because he had a simple nature, fashioned on few and straight lines, and dominated by a strong conviction which overshadowed his other qualities, he has generally been pictured as devoid of them. Yet he was many-sided, a man of taste, a man of the world. To the end of his life he enjoyed the classics and took a scholarly pleasure in writing Latin. Books were his friends—he "turned back to them and studied them whensoever he was free from public affairs"—so one who knew him tells us. In the days of his popularity at Court, he used to read aloud "Pantagruel" to the young King, nor could

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a prince get finer teaching than from the royal giant, Gargantua's letter to his son. But the choice of the book does not show Coligny a Puritan, and that he should have let Charles IX hear its heresies was a favourite charge against him. The anti-monastic, anti-Papal spirit of Rabelais, his religious philosophy, with its freedom and dignity of reason, had much in common with Coligny's Protestantism, and Pantagruel's "great Saviour of the faithful, who was slain shamefully in Judea through the envy of the Pontiffs, the Doctors, and the Monks," must have appealed to his mind. Pantagruel's name was indeed a tradition among the Châtillons, for it was Gaspard's brother, the Cardinal, who sent Rabelais to Italy, who helped him on (as later he helped Ronsard), and to whom Rabelais dedicated the fourth book of his great work. Coligny may well have seen him and would have delighted in his company.

Coligny believed fervently in knowledge. "The ignorance of letters," he said, "hath brought with it thick and skulking shadows, not only to the State, but to the Church, and among these shadows was it that the Pope's authority had birth—that power which swayeth none but the blind and those who have lost their way—even as Pluto commanded nought but the night and the darkness." The desire for light pursued him throughout life and he gave it a practical form, for he built a big college in his grounds, "in the sweet and wholesome air of Châtillon," with well-endowed Chairs for Greek and Hebrew, where boys might be taught as he wished. "A college, in sooth," he used to say, "is but an apprenticeship to holiness," and sanctity, for him, included wisdom.

His love of education came from his love of children. He was very human. If he worked with the King, he also played with him. There is a strange isolated picture of the royal boys rushing upon him with lighted torches, in rude horse-play, as was the custom at the Feast of the Innocents. Or we have other more normal impressions. Now he stands at ease in the King's ante-room, gossiping about the war in Flanders with Brantôme and the great Captain, Strozzi; now he is showing his garden at Châtillon with pride to his admirer, Francis Hotman, the Protestant pamphleteer, who has come from a distance to talk business and finds the chief more inclined to discuss his cuttings and plantings. For Coligny loved his garden with the love of a practical gardener.

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sunniest pictures of his life are those of him at work e, whether found by the Ambassadors from Court, sickle and, contentedly pruning his vines ; or tending the melons he sent as a present to François de Guise, the man whom, in after years, he was accused of having murdered. He loved his Château too—he added buildings, and got Jean Goujon to adorn it. But this may mean no more than the prevailing fashion, in a day when every grandee tried to outshine his neighbour as an art-collector ; and Coligny had the precedent of his uncle, the greatest among them all—for Ecouen and Chantilly, the Constable's palaces, were bye-words for artistic splendour.

4 Spain
Coligny set out in life as a man of fashion. The first time he appeared upon the political stage was in 1539, when he was twenty years old, on the occasion of Charles V's coming to France on his way to the Low Countries. The long war between him and François I had come to an end, and the preparations for his welcome were sumptuous. The Dauphin was sent to receive him on the Spanish frontier, and Coligny rode in his train, in the Dauphin's livery of black and silver. That Dauphin, afterwards Henri II, had a real affection for his follower, and fortune seemed to smile on him. At Bayonne, the seat of so many diplomatic festivities, the pageants and the banquets had no pause, and Coligny officiated as Ensign in the Constable's Company. Thus his relations with Spain, which were to end in grim earnest, began in play. After the return from Bayonne, he continued to follow the Dauphin and rose to be his gentleman of the Bedchamber, plunging into all the distractions of the Court. There is a ball in honour of some grand lady's wedding, and Coligny attends the King who enters " with Madame d'Étampes on his arm " ; Catherine de' Medici is there with her husband ; the Royalties dance with one another, but Coligny leads out the bride. Or there is a great tournament. Coligny again follows the Dauphin, together with his brother, Andelot, and this time the prince's colours are white and green. The corselets of the Châtillons are gilt, their short, hooded capes are of green velvet, their sashes are green and white, their green silk hats have white feathers. The Dauphin and his fellow fought their adversaries " very gingerly," with lances of ash. The Châtillons also played their part—one of their mock opponents was François de Guise.

But Coligny was not a born reveller. He had meanwhile

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found his real vocation. In 1542, three years after his meeting with the Emperor, war between that sovereign and France broke out again. Coligny served in the Low Countries, first under the Duc d'Orléans, then under the Dauphin. He loved the game, he was reckless and gay-hearted. Now he is wounded, now writing to his aunt, after a siege, to excuse himself for being a bad correspondent. He has promised to send her letters—she must think him “the laziest fellow in the world—” and he was, truth to say, “little hindered by the service of the King,” only—he had not written. It was just such a letter as any gallant nephew might write to any sympathetic aunt, and it comes down to us with a strangely modern ring. In 1544, his experience was enlarged, for he joined the King's army in Italy and fought in the battle of Cérisole, which gave the French one of their greatest victories. A few months later, when the scene had once more shifted to France and there had been fighting in Champagne, his master, the Dauphin, made him Commander of a regiment, and his military career was assured.

Court and camp now divided his existence. The Court of the close of François I's reign presented a strange medley of cabals and revels. Men in favour had no chance to withdraw from the stage, nor did they as a rule feel any inclination to do so. There is nothing that more impassably divides one age from another than its pleasures, and Coligny himself would not have felt shocked at much that would disgust us to-day. We find his brother, Cardinal Odet, a man of fine character and serious convictions, even then tending towards Protestantism, hurrying out of his bed to join some midnight Bacchanalia in the streets, or taking part in a royal feast which the Ferrarese Ambassador described as a “revel of Sardanapalus,” and at which the Cardinal of Ferrara, no more squeamish than other Cardinals, refused to be present. Coligny fulfilled his rôle as a courtier, but his heart was not in such things. In both phases of his life, in war and in peace, friends played a great part. He was a romantic man, as we shall see in the later days of his second marriage. In these earlier times the romance that was in him was shown in a friendship, and there is ironic sadness in the fact that it was for François de Guise. “In their youth they had been linked together with singular familiaritie, insomuch that to testifie their friendship with all, they went appareled in like rayment,” says an old writer, translating from the

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French. They fought in the North side by side, they jousted, they tilted at the ring, they masqueraded in company, "and both," Brantôme tells us, "were of a very jocund spirit, performing more extravagant follies than all the rest, and there was none that they did not perform ill, for they were clumsy players, and unlucky in their sports." There is something in the last phrase that brings the two big men—too big, too weighty for their surroundings—very vividly before us; and we seem to see them striving to adapt the strength and sinew made for large fields to the lighter tasks for which they were not suited. Coligny, it is recorded, once shooting a pellet of earth, for fun, from his cross-bow, hit another friend, Strozzi, by mistake on the forehead and stunned him. Perhaps heroes should not be seen at play. Nor had Guise and Coligny too much of it.

It is curious, by the light of these years, to look onward at those others when the feud which arose between the two was a brand that set fire to France and kindled the flame of civil war, ending in massacre and ruin. "It is well known on what good terms we were at the beginning of the reign of Henri II, and how easy it would have been to continue so," wrote Coligny himself. It was not so easy as he thought, but his words show that the difference of creed, which we might imagine to have fixed a gulf between them, made no such insuperable division. One reason for estrangement—the beginning of the rift—arose quickly. It was mainly through Coligny's good offices that Guise had found favour with the Dauphin, and, having gained it, he knew well how to use it. The family of Guise was of the worldliest. There was a scheme for marrying François' brother, Claude de Lorraine, to the daughter of Diane de Poitiers, which, if successful, would prove a certain avenue to power. François de Guise asked Coligny's opinion; Coligny gave it in round terms. "I make more account," said he, "of an inch of good name, than of never so great riches." François de Guise could not stand the truth any better than other great gentlemen, and retorted that Coligny had "not answered as a friend and comrade, but rather as one who envied him the good fortune that the marriage would bring." Like most advice asked for, that of Coligny was rejected; the marriage in question took place and a stiffness ensued between the friends.

In 1553, the breach had widened. Coligny—by then made

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Admiral of France—gained the day against the Emperor at Renty, by his tactics and his courage. But Guise took the glory to himself. "*Ah, mort Dieu!*" he cried, "do not try to rob me of my honour." "I have no wish to," said Coligny. "Nor could you," retorted Guise. But it needed worse disputes than these to destroy the tie that bound them. In the heart of Coligny, at least, feelings died hard, and long after the feud between the Guises and Châtillons had been openly declared, we find him warning Madame de Guise of a plot against her husband's life. He would not go direct to the Duke, "lest the same should imagine he wished to regain his friendship and to play the kind officious friend, in return for the intelligence." That the one should be capable of such an action, the other of such a suspicion, enough defines the distance between them.

Coligny had other comrades in his youth: the famous soldier, Brissac; the great Captain, Strozzi, for whom, indeed, his devotion almost rivalled his feeling for Guise. In Strozzi's company it was that he went to Italy. His brother, Andelot, was to accompany them; the Dauphin gave them letters to all the Italian Courts and Catherine wrote to her cousin, the Duke of Florence, begging him to be kind to them—"their chief desire being to see your city and the antiquities which are there." The plans for their trip sound very like the plans of this generation. They had saved 14,000 scudi for their journey, they were "to go everywhere in Italy for pleasure," and they meant to be away about a year. The touch with which the chronicler concludes is, perhaps, the most intimate. "All this," he writes, "annoys their uncle, the Grand Constable, especially as both will be gone. If it had only been one, he would have stood it." After all, it was fated to be only one. Andelot, who had gone first to Germany, got into trouble through a duel there and had to keep out of sight afterwards. So it was Strozzi alone who met Coligny at Venice. There is but little record of their doings, and the only vivid glimpse we get of Coligny is at Ferrara, at the opening of 1547. He was the guest of Duke Ercole II, who mentions him in two letters to the Cardinal Ippolito d'Este. "I have set myself," says the Duke, "to provide him with all the diversions I can, such as country pastimes and the listening to musical strains. To-day we have had a new and, to my thinking, most delectable tragi-comedy. I think he will leave here well satisfied."

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Duke Ercole himself was fond of sports and feasting, and had no taste for theology, but his wife was the French Princess Renée, the friend and follower of Calvin, who made her court into a haven for every sort of fugitive heretic. The memories of Calvin's sojourn there were still fresh when Coligny reached it, and he must have found its atmosphere congenial; nor is it probable that his visits to its rulers were without effect upon his mind.

The death of François I, on the last day of March, 1547, compelled his return to France. The hour was propitious, for his uncle, the Constable, who had been lying low, returned to power and, for the moment, was predominant at Court. Gaspard was made Colonel-General of Infantry; future honours seemed certain. But Anne de Montmorency did not feel secure, in spite of the facts that the post of Constable meant the command of the army, and that the office of Grand Maître conferred on him administrative leadership: that, not to speak of his wealth, his territorial possessions were immense; that the Governorships of Provence, Picardy and Languedoc and, later, of the Isle de France, all belonged to him and his family; that his nephew controlled the Infantry and was soon after Admiral of France. In the face of these distinctions he still had to reckon with a danger that outweighed them all. This was the rival power of the Guises, as rich and as strong and ambitious as the Montmorencys themselves; more ambitious as far as the younger branch was concerned. The six sons of the old Duke, Claude de Guise, were more covetous of preferment, and far more unscrupulous about getting it, than the three nephews of the Constable—for the Châtillons had consciences, the Guises had none, and little they cared for France, apart from what she gave them. They certainly had the lion's share of ecclesiastical privileges. Three Cardinal's hats and eighteen archbishoprics and bishoprics had fallen into their hands—an enormous asset added to their other sources of influence. They had a hold on Scotland through their sister, Mary of Guise, and her daughter, Mary Queen of Scots, while a relation of theirs ruled as Duke of Lorraine. Under these circumstances, it was inevitable that a death struggle, which had begun in personal hostilities, should continue between the Guises and the Montmorencys and should grow into a war which did not end till the end of the century. Nor is it the only time that mundane greed and ambition have fought under the name of religion.

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This same year of 1547 was a crowded one for Coligny. In June his mother died at the Constable's house in Paris, characteristically refusing to have a priest. There was no need, she said, for God had Himself shown her "the way to fear Him . . . and to get free from the trammels of the body." "His mercy shall be unto them that fear Him to the third and fourth generation"—these were the words continually on her lips at the end. "Why should I console you for your mother's death?" wrote l'Hôpital to Cardinal Odet. "We must not give the name of death to our passage into a noble, an everlasting life—the exchange of this inhospitable earth, mire-encrusted, for the vast and radiant dwelling-place called Heaven. . . . She had ended her duties as a mother; she was proud of her children and grandchildren, of descendants even more perfect than she had dreamed they could be. Very old, with all her faculties untouched, sure of a better life, she has ascended into heaven. What more beautiful end of a finer existence could better comfort your sorrow, and dry your tears?"

Perhaps it was the blank that her loss left in his life which made Coligny now turn to marriage. His ideals were high; he had no notion of taking a wife whom he could not love as a companion, and we may feel sure that, unlike his contemporaries, his heart was in his choice. It fell on Charlotte Laval, the Constable's ward, no court beauty—she was rather plain than otherwise—but a wise and tender woman who shared and understood his beliefs. Throughout their happy married life, chequered by the death of four young children and by many other adversities, the Colignys made the word virtue, so often a cold and dull abstraction, into a warm reality, a living and loving household word.

In the next year, 1548, Coligny was given the command of the proceedings against the English, whom the French were blockading at Boulogne. The recovery of that town was dear to France, and the Constable had set his heart upon the exploit being performed by his family. Success, however, lagged; there were failures and delays, jealousies and interference on the part of Guise; and, though the end was in large part brought about by Coligny's strategy, it was not until 1550, when the wearied English themselves proposed terms, that any settlement was arrived at. But if this campaign did not bring him the greatest military prestige, it established his genius as a soldier in a different, perhaps more important direction, for it

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his entry on May 23, 1550) . . . "came to Duresme place, where in their journey they were met by Mr. Treasurer and three-score gentlemen at Whulwich, Dertford and the Tower. . . ."

May 25. "The ambassadors came to the Court, where they saw me take the oath for the acceptance of the treaty, and afterward dined with me; and after dinner saw a pastime of ten against ten at the ring, whereof on the one side were the Duke of Southfolk, the Vicedam, the Lord Lisle, and seven other gentlemen appareled in yellow. On the other, the Lord Stra, Monsieur Henady, and the eight other in blue."

26. "The ambassadors saw the baiting of the bears and bulls."

27. "The ambassadors, after they had hunted, sat with me at supper."

28. "The same went to see Hampton Court, where they did hunt and the same night return to Duresme place."

29. "The ambassadors had a fair supper made them by the Duke of Somerset, and afterward went into the Tems and saw both the bear hunted in the river, and also wild fire cast out of boats, and many pretty conceits."

30. "The ambassadors took their leave, and the next day departed."

It is pleasant to think of the grave Coligny hunting in the glades of Hampton Court, dressed with sober magnificence and mounted on some superb charger; it is almost pathetic to picture him looking on with amusement at the "wild fire," he who was to watch in deadly earnest far wilder fires spreading terror over France. But now all was suavity for him. The most charming remembrance that he kept of his visit to England was that of the young King whom he learned to love—to admire also, for his quick parts and his thoughtfulness. In after days we find him taking a good deal of trouble to get Edward's portrait from England. He wanted to hang it at Châtillon. His other impressions were probably restricted to Court-life, but the "wild fires" and "bear hunts" showed, to say the least, only one aspect of the nation.

There is interest in imagining what he might have seen: all that was really going on behind the State functions. Some other brief entries in the King's diary are alone enough to bring the medley before us—the more vividly, perhaps, for their bareness. It was a strange England, where, on May 2, 1549, "Joan Bocher,

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otherwise called Joan of Kent, was burnt for holding that Christ was not incarnate of the Virgin," and where next year, "there were letters sent to every bishop to pluck down the 'altars'". . . as well as "for the taking of certain Chaplains of the Lady Mary for saying Mass"; while, almost at the same moment, "it was appointed that the Germans should have the Austin-Friars for their church to have their service in." Those were times of sudden changes, of surprises. To hear that, in 1550, "an earthquake was at Croiedon," and that on June 22 of that year, "there was a privy search made through all Sussex, for all vagabonds, egiptians, conspirators, prophets, all players, and such like," gives us a sense of risk and insecurity which makes those days seem farther off from our own than accounts of graver matters. All this is, however, a digression. Coligny's visit was too short to learn much except by hearsay, and he has unfortunately left us no record of it, unless it be of an English friendship; for the next year he employs some pomp and circumstance in sending, "by this bearer, some birds, as a present to the Marquis of Norwich."

His power in his own country was increasing. In 1552, he was made Admiral of France, a post which gave him the Governments of Normandy and Picardy. And his military prestige had been heightened by the brilliant part that he had taken in the war which ended in the capture of Metz, Toul and Verdun by the French, allied to the German Princes. In 1555, he went to Brussels, there to meet Charles V and conclude the Treaty of Vaucelles, by which he won diplomatic laurels—events already chronicled in a former volume.¹ But peace did not last for long, and two years later, in 1557, the Emperor was again at war with France. The siege of St. Quentin, which closed this campaign, was, although crowned by disaster, one of Coligny's greatest exploits. The Constable had erred in delaying to protect Picardy from the imperial troops, and the last hope of saving it was, as Coligny advised, to occupy the town of St. Quentin. He had, when all was told, two thousand five hundred men and insufficient artillery, while the enemy mustered forty-five thousand. But nothing daunted, he begged his men to throw him over the wall if he should ever mention surrender, and promised that he would do the same by them. He flogged the idle, he strengthened the defences; there is no

¹ "Catherine de' Medici and the French Reformation."

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saying what he might not have effected, had not the Constable again blundered. He made a mistaken move and was completely routed by the Spaniards, who afterwards advanced upon the town. Coligny's spirit rose to the occasion, and when his foes planted the flags they had taken upon the entrenchments, "he had the walls lined, the trumpets blown and the muskets fired off," as for a festivity. He expelled all those who did not work; he shut up in a church two thousand women and children, whose tears might enervate his soldiers; and "when the English archers shot into the town an offer of life and liberty, he sent back in the same manner the laconic answer, 'Regem habemus.'"¹ For two weeks and more he staved off the final blow, and when the enemy at last succeeded in entering St. Quentin, he was found fighting on the most perilous spot and taken prisoner.

His three years of captivity in the Low Countries mark a boundary line in his existence, at all events on the surface. When the Spaniards took him, he was nominally still a Catholic. After his release, he soon figured as a confessed Protestant. But, in truth, the dividing line is more apparent than real, and, when his imprisonment began, he already belonged more to the new faith than the old. All his early traditions—his evangelical education, his intercourse with Marguerite d'Angoulême and her followers, his familiarity with l'Hôpital, and that statesman's marked Huguenot tendencies—had given him a strong bias towards the Reformed Church; and this inclination had been fostered in the Huguenot atmosphere which prevailed at Court in the earlier part of Henri II's reign. In those days, the New Religion was the vogue. The King, afterwards so bigoted, then sang Marot's psalms as he hunted; there were heterodox services and preachers, in whom Catherine de' Medici delighted. With her, indeed, the leaning towards Protestantism was an intellectual taste, not a mere result of fashion, and had not political considerations come in, she would probably have embraced Protestantism. In later times Coligny's views became more advanced, and although in 1556, the year before the siege of St. Quentin, he still attended Mass and took part in Church functions, still needed "a Papal dispensation to eat meat," we find him, directly after, mentioned by Theodore de Bèze as a person who was not "hostile to the Protestant cause." Bèze did not speak without book. Some months before, a French colonizer in Brazil had written to

¹ Whitehead. "Gaspard de Coligny."

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Coligny and Calvin as the two authorities fittest to choose the fresh men he needed to go out to him. Coligny himself appointed one of their leaders, and he picked out a Protestant for the post.

It was thus that matters stood when he was made prisoner, An illness, due to his close confinement, deepened his growing convictions; and "being vexed fortie dayes with an agewe . . . as his fits left him, he commanded a Byble to be brought unto him, to ease the grieve and sorrowe of his minde with reading of it. And he studied so much upon it, that he began from thenseforth to have a taste for the pure religion and trew Godlinesse, and to lerne the right manner of calling uppon God." And Calvin wrote to him in his solitude, solemnly bidding him heed "God's lesson," since it was "as though he had wished to speak to you privately in your ear." It was not in vain; and the "lesson" was further driven home by events in his own family.

Andelot, who influenced him considerably, had already outdone him in heterodoxy—had abstained from Mass and held Huguenot services in Brittany. What affected Coligny more directly was that a letter was intercepted from his brother to himself, urging him to "persevere" ("presumably in his Protestant opinions"), and that it fell into the hands of Philip, who was not slow to use it against the Châtillons. Cardinal Granvella, Philip's agent, accused the Admiral of being "a Lutheran of the Lutherans," who "never heard Mass, and lived a most wicked life, so that if these Châtillons did not change their tune, they should be made to pay the cost." His words were speedily justified. Andelot was summoned before Henri II and charged with Huguenot heresies, more especially with sending "a Calvinistic tract" to the Admiral. Hot-headed as he was, a born quarreller in noble causes, Andelot denied nothing, but lost his temper in his speech of self-defence. The King had him arrested and only released him after long delays, on humiliating conditions. Meanwhile Granvella's words remained and Coligny had been stigmatized as a Lutheran. The Spaniard was not far from the truth, and the long months of captivity probably did no more than strengthen the Admiral's opinions and crystallize his decision to profess them.

The fact that, in his three years' absence, the Guises had established their power and reigned supreme no doubt helped him to a clear determination; for although, with Coligny, the

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religious motive came first he would not have been of his day had not the political come second. He emerged from his imprisonment in 1559, after the conclusion of the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis, in a propitious hour for his cause, just when the Reformed faith was enjoying marked consideration. Already in 1558, it was said by Calvin to number 300,000 adherents. In confessing his beliefs, Coligny, for the moment, incurred no real danger, and indeed exposed them to the public view without any fear of consequences.

We have a telling glimpse of him soon after his liberation, when he is taking two Englishmen, Mr. Wotton and the envoy, Throckmorton, to Notre Dame. "The said Admiral," wrote the last-named gentleman, "toke occasion to question with me toching the state of religion in England, and supposing he wold have remayned still in our company, after I was entered into the quire, and masse ones begonne, I loked for him ; but I could by no meanes understand him to be there, but that he was slipped away from masse ; notwithstanding, he was ready after to bring us home againe." The lordly, matter-of-fact British travellers, discoursing of their opinions, are familiar enough to us ; their guide, the Puritan gentleman, so sincere, that he would not hear the words in which he did not believe, so courteous that he would not let convictions interfere with hospitality, is a figure that stands alone. He impresses us the more because of the security of his position amid his heresies. It was not long after this that he held *Prêches* openly at Dieppe and in his apartments at Paris, and that a child of his was baptized according to the rites of Geneva. Far from injuring his reputation his tenets seemed to heighten it, and for the next two years his power at Court was on the increase. "The Admiral ruled the roast," says Brantôme, "I saw it with mine own eyes." The tyranny of the Catholic Guises was daily helping to make the Châtillons more popular. Lampoons and insults were showered on the cowardly Cardinal, Charles de Lorraine, and the fact that, soon after, Duke François was made Lieutenant-General did not add to the good fame of his party.

Although Coligny's change of religion had come gradually, the tardiness of his move did not take away from its importance. That he should so clearly have confessed his creed and party was of immense political significance. Henceforward he stands out consistently as the leader of the Huguenots, and it is as such that he was affected by the events which followed his

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release. These events have been more fully chronicled in a former volume,¹ and the briefest summary of them in their relation to the Admiral will here be sufficient for our purpose.

Henri II's death took place in 1559, and his son, François II, was virtually ruled by his mother. She had dangerous rivals in the Guises, more formidable than ever since the marriage of the young King to their niece, Mary Stuart. In Catherine's determination to be Regent, and to play off the Guises against the Montmorencys, in order to gain her end, lay the secret of the fluctuations in the power of either family. There followed the disastrous conspiracy of Amboise, made by the Huguenots against the Catholic Guises; but far from taking any part in it, Coligny strongly disapproved of the undertaking. In the coil of disturbances that followed he counselled mercy and tolerance; Catherine listened, balanced matters and did nothing. An Edict in favour of the Protestants proved impotent to help matters, and Coligny urged the removal of the Guises and the calling of the Notables. In the first of these plans he failed, but succeeded in the second. The Assembly of Notables met at Fontainebleau, in 1560, to discuss the religious difficulty. Catherine, the King, the Constable, were present when Coligny rose and presented two petitions. Their main contents were a protest against the conspiracy of Amboise and a bold proposition that both churches, old and new, should live side by side on equal terms. The incident is dramatic and worth dwelling on, because this was the first State occasion on which Coligny had declared himself a Huguenot, although for a year and more his opinions had been publicly known. His scheme was audacious and produced consternation in his audience. Guise sprang to his feet and cried that, rather than incur such a calamity, he himself would ride forth against the Admiral with a hundred armed men. But the second day proposals were made for the calling of the States-General to settle religious affairs, and the Assembly dispersed without any more definite decision.

Events succeeded each other rapidly. François II fell dangerously ill. If he died, the claim to the Regency lay between Catherine and the elder Prince of the Blood, Antoine de Navarre. The power of the Guises, the King's uncles through his wife, asserted itself at his deathbed, and Catherine

¹ "Catherine de' Medici and the French Reformation."

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felt that her best chance of the Regency was in courting their omnipotent alliance. Antoine de Navarre was the husband of the arch-heretic, Jeanne d'Albret. His brother, Louis de Condé, was not only a Huguenot, but a plotter and a source of disaffection—dangerous alike from his abilities, and his position as a Bourbon Prince. Both men were a menace to the Regency, as well as to the rule of the Guises. Catherine sent for them to come to Orleans and promptly imprisoned Condé. The weaker Navarre she won by blandishments. The King's death, which quickly supervened, changed the face of affairs. The despotism of the Guises pressed painfully upon her, effacement seemed to threaten her, and after a period of diplomatic waiting and temporizing, she adroitly shifted her position. She turned a cold shoulder on the Guises, released Condé, tied Navarre more closely to her side, and threw herself upon Coligny. It was not surprising he should think that he and she could co-operate, and that, through her, he could advance the cause of his religion. There seemed, in his eyes, a chance that he might mould the young King, Charles IX, and fulfil his dream of an ideal monarchy.

And here we come to a sentiment which was a guiding force in his life. We should not understand him at all, from the outset to the end, did we not grasp the fact that his central idea was monarchy—his central feeling, devotion to the Throne. It might be that loyalty to the Crown would make him revolt against a King—such a one as he deemed unworthy of royal prerogative; but to the monarchical principle he remained romantically faithful. There was nothing subversive in his character; it was only in the logical conclusion of his beliefs that there lay a revolutionary element. But of this fact he himself only slowly became conscious. He was one of those simple people born with reverence—for princes among other institutions—and to be a great gentleman was, to him, only part of the natural order; but he was never a worldly man, and his very reverence cleared his vision and made him keen to see abuses of his ideals. Charles IX was sincerely fond of him and allowed him a free hand as Mentor. His family shared in his good fortune. "They are," wrote the Spanish envoy, "continually in the palace. When once the gates are open, the King and Queen-Mother are never without one of them." And a little later, "the most Christian King," he says, "does not make one step that the Admiral does not follow." The result was evident, and the boy's education was entrusted to Protes-

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tant governesses and to a latitudinarian tutor. All this was a bitter pill for the Guises to swallow ; their star seemed to be on the decline, Court and people were for once in agreement, and enmity towards them was universal. They were not, however, long inactive. They had probably foreseen that a break must ensue between the Constable, easy-minded but Catholic, and his heterodox nephews ; and when, in 1561, the split came, Duke François formed a Catholic Triumvirate with Anne de Montmorency and the Maréchal de St. André. The pact had not been signed when Coligny got wind of it and sent a plain-spoken protest to his uncle.

" Monseigneur " (it ran), " although the bearer of this, the first time that he came before me, entreated me earnestly to write to you, yet seemed it hardly reasonable to do so, for I feared that my letters could be as little to your taste as all the remonstrances you have had from the Cardinal de Châtillon and myself. But the same bearer having once more urged me to write, I will do so, seeing that I have ever loved you as a father, and served and honoured you as such. Nor do I wish to show up your weakness, as I should do in dealing with other men. For even though I had all the right upon my side, still, when the matter resteth between you and me, I am content to say that I am in the wrong, rather than start a quarrel. And I beg you, sir, to set before yourself the troubles that are brooding over this kingdom, and the evils into which we shall fall if God lend us not His hand. As to the cause thereof, I appeal to all persons of sane judgment. But when it cometh to *your* concerns, I entreat you to remember in whose hands you are. Are not those to whom you have allied yourself the very same persons who swore to compass your ruin and that of all your House ? . . . The cleverest man in the world may be duped once, but if he be duped twice he is a laughing-stock. . . . And most certainly all the present company do *not* intend to be caught in the snare."

But Anne de Montmorency was not the man to be put off by a letter, and the trio solemnly ratified their bond in the Chapel at Fontainebleau. Probably three more irreligious men never took the Sacrament together.

The States-General, at length convened, established (chiefly owing to Coligny) the Regency of Catherine, with Antoine de Navarre as her dumb partner—a momentary blow for the Huguenots, as Antoine joined the Triumvirate. There followed the reactionary and persecuting Edict of July ; and then,

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by a swing of the pendulum, the famous Colloquy of Poissy,¹ at its outset the most Protestant of experiments. It was a Conference conceived in Catherine's own spirit, and not displeasing to Coligny. Ministers of the new faith, scholars and prelates of the old, were to meet together for the discussion and solution of religious questions. Never was Huguenotism more in fashion. Marot's psalms were again the "last new thing," for the last new lords and ladies; *Prêches* were held in the houses of noblemen and attended by crowded congregations; a great wedding of the day was celebrated by the Calvinist, Bêza, according to the rites of Geneva. And the little place became a rallying point for all that was best in Protestantism. Theodore de Bêza came there, and Jeanne d'Albret, and the learned Peter Martyr Vermilius—who was visited by Coligny in his lodging. "The Admiral himself," Vermilius reported, "is so godly and courteous as he twice or thrice visited me even in my chamber and most gently saluted me." Doubtless they took counsel together. There were private meetings, public disputations. But in spite of these efforts, the Colloquy ended in smoke. The division of the Reformers into Calvinists and Lutherans, the obstinacy of the Cardinal de Lorraine and his masterly skill in hair-splitting, prevented any sort of settlement. Another Council at St. Germain and the tolerant Edict of January also proved ineffective. And straight upon these failures descended, like a tide of blood, the awful news of the massacre of Vassy: the Guise enormity, the rehearsal for St. Bartholomew's Eve, at which Duke François deliberately slaughtered a helpless congregation of Huguenots who were quietly worshipping in Church. The country, already dangerously perturbed, was only waiting to flare up. Spain, long suspicious of Catherine, was narrowly watching France, while Philip's hatred for Coligny was gaining in bitterness and force. Civil war, in short, seemed almost inevitable, and was made quite so by Condé's desire for it. Under the pretext that the Queen-Mother had asked him to protect her, he armed, and marched with his troops towards Orleans. Coligny, like most great men, averse to civil war, still held back and waited. "What gives us all the sharpest pain," he wrote, "is that the authority of the King and the Queen is abused. . . . I protest before God, that all the troops in this city have not taken arms against the King and his rule, nor against those who hold the

¹ See my former volume, "Catherine de' Medici and the French Reformation," p. 159.

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Roman Catholic faith ; nay, in very truth, we have taken arms to uphold the King and his sovereign power, and to hinder the violence used against those of our Religion, contrary to the will of the King and the Queen—contrary, also, to their Edicts."

But he could not stem the current. Catherine, always cowed by Spain, faced about, made an alliance with Philip and sought his help against the enemy ; the Protestants, for their part, called in the English, and foreigners entered France on both sides. Coligny, who had meanwhile yielded to necessity, went to join Condé at Orleans. War began in earnest, and the siege of Orleans, the siege of Rouen, the battle of Dreux, all three disasters for the Huguenots, succeeded each other at no great distance. At Dreux (in 1562) Condé was taken prisoner, and it was only after long negotiations that he was set free, and the Treaty of Amboise concluded. But this was the worst calamity of all, for it abolished the Protestants' liberty of worship, and gave away their cause. It ended the first War of Religion.

Before the Treaty had been discussed, and in that same year, 1562, an event had occurred which touched Coligny's life more nearly than any treaty could do. This was the murder of François, Duc de Guise—committed by a Protestant, one Poltrou de Méry, who swore that he was Coligny's agent, and had done the deed by his command. No sensible student of history now believes that this could be true, and Coligny's innocence is practically established. ✓

Even then, no fair mind credited the notion of his guilt. But whether or not they did so honestly, it suited the Guises to feel sure of it. The stakes at the Court and in the State ran high, and he was their most formidable rival. Henceforth the duel between them and Coligny became a vendetta, and they the bloodhounds pursuing his steps, only to be appeased by his death. Meanwhile, they had to make a case to convince the public—as they knew, no difficult matter. For the fortunes of the war and the prowess of Duke François had turned the tide in his favour, and he had become the idol of the fickle populace. Paris, especially, always fanatically Catholic, was but too glad to incriminate Coligny. Yet, backed though they were by common credulity, the Guises had no sound evidence to go upon. Poltrou himself three times retracted his accusation, and though he returned to it again, it was under the pain of torture. The money that he swore the Admiral had paid him

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for evil purposes was proved by Coligny to have been given for a horse, and once again for some quite trivial purpose. As for any written testimony against him, there is nothing more reliable than a letter from his bitter foe, Chantonnay, the spy and agent of Spain, who on other occasions never scrupled to lie freely about the great Huguenot. Chantonnay described how a letter had been found, written by the Maréchal de Montmorency to Poltrot. "The Marshal urged the assassin to retract the declaration he had made before Catherine and to stop at nothing to clear the name of Coligny. . . . In return he promised to save him. And it was in consequence of this—so Chantonnay asserts—that the murderer recanted."¹ Yet this letter, so minutely described, of such invaluable contents, was never produced or seen by others, although if it had been made public, it would practically have gained the Catholic cause. It strains common sense to believe that it existed apart from Chantonnay's imagination.

There is, however, a deeper and more trustworthy proof of its unreality than any arguments. It lies in Coligny's character, as we see it throughout his life. A man does not do what is impossible to him; nor does history afford us instances of isolated actions cut off from the rest of a human being's nature. Coligny sternly advocated law and loyalty, and as sternly opposed crime and treachery. He was straight and honourable, even to bluntness, and remarkably faithful to those old associations which so much affected his relations with Guise. But even if this were not so, his own declaration of his innocence, followed by his frank admission of his attitude towards the death of Guise, would be sufficient to clear his name. He tells (in a letter to Catherine, as well as in the course of his defence) how he had heard men, Poltrot among others, conspire to kill the Duc de Guise and how he himself had kept silence, doing nothing to prevent the deed, and also nothing to further it. "Think not, Madame," he wrote to the Queen-Mother, "that the words which I utter in self-defence are said out of any regret for the death of Monsieur de Guise." And his words on this memorable occasion are fraught with dignity and sincerity. Although the safety of his religion meant more to him than the safety of any living person, we know that the man who uttered them was incapable of falsity or baseness.

¹ Whitehead. "Gaspard de Coligny."

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But the accusation proved to be of fatal importance in his history—it was closely interwoven with his destiny. Without it, and all that it engendered, the massacre of St. Bartholomew might never have taken place.

CHAPTER III

The Wars of Religion

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THE feud between the Guises and Coligny had now become a war of vengeance which endangered the life of the Admiral; and Henri de Guise, Duke François' son, carried on the hatred, to pursue which had become a part of his family duty. During the absence of the Court and the negotiations at Bayonne the quarrel was naturally in abeyance. Coligny was peacefully at Châtillon working in his garden, talking to his wife, making a wedding feast for his brother, Odet, who was married, in Cardinal's robes and in spurred boots, to the fashionable Isabelle de Hauteville. But the Admiral's home life did not last. Catherine's first act of diplomacy upon her return journey was to patch up a reconciliation. None knew better than she the danger to the nation that their enmity involved; and none knew less than she that semblances cannot serve as realities. She made the common mistake of cynical natures and believed that by keeping up an appearance you end by producing the substance. So she arranged a sumptuous function at Blois, where the Guises and Coligny were to meet and vow friendship and forgiveness, after which the Admiral's innocence was to be publicly proclaimed. Henri de Guise, his widowed mother (Anna d'Este), his uncles—the Duc d'Aumale and the Cardinal de Lorraine—were to be there. The day came. The Duc d'Aumale did not appear; Coligny stepped forward, stern but faithful to his word, so did Henri de Guise in all the splendour of his arrogant youth. But when the moment arrived, he refused the kiss of peace. The Duchesse de Guise and the Cardinal made a cold show of reconciliation, Coligny's innocence was proclaimed, and the hollow business came to an end, leaving the actors of the farce where it found them.

The Guises could afford to be overbearing. Catherine, though she saw the need for civil peace and sought to promote it, had, on her homeward journey, clearly shown that for the present she meant to propitiate Spain. Alva had schooled her to

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good purpose, and when, on her road through the domains of the Huguenot Queen, Jeanne d'Albret, she came to Nérac, the stronghold of Protestantism, she took the opportunity of imposing the Catholic faith upon Jeanne's subjects. It was one of those actions which proved her want of judgment and her ignorance of human nature. The fact remained that she could not plant by force what would not take root in the soil—or, even if it were planted, could but produce fresh discord. For she was trying her hand on material that was anything but malleable. The Huguenots in Béarn and Navarre had not been exemplary. Their conduct had been as crude and savage as that of their Catholic adversaries, and it was said that the sight of the ruined churches, the broken statues and open tombs at Nérac, gave the young King, for the first time, a real hatred of the Protestant religion; that, demonstrative and uncontrolled as he was, he showed his feelings in his altered bearing, in the violence of his gestures and his words. It is quite likely; for Charles IX's æsthetic sense was the strongest thing about him, and the harm done to beautiful buildings was more likely to move him than any injury to human beings.

Catherine, however, was determined to make out that all was well. "There are so many nobles here," she wrote from Cognac to Madame de Guise, "that every evening in the ball-room I could fancy I was still at Bayonne, if only I could see the Queen, my daughter. Everybody dances together, Huguenots, Papists and all, so smoothly that it is impossible to believe that they are as they are. If God willed that they were as wise elsewhere as they are here, we should at last be at rest . . . I cannot write to Monsieur le Cardinal, because the King is in such mighty haste to take me off to hunt the stag—which is the cause that I must finish this letter."

But the Huguenots were not "as wise elsewhere," and it was an unhappy France over which the young King now had to reign. The Peace of Amboise had been but a mock Peace which covered a multitude of discords. Protestants and Catholics were still by the ears; provincial Parliaments constantly refused to carry out those articles of the treaty which favoured Protestant worship; the Jesuits were allowed to open a college in Paris, and Aumale formed a powerful Catholic League, which was followed by others planned on a like model. The death, too, of Calvin, in 1564, was, as has been said, a grievous loss to his Church; and the French Protestants felt



L'AMIRAL, GASPARD DE COLIGNY EN 1579.

BIBLIOTHEQUE NATIONALE.

FRANCOIS CLOUET.

From a photograph by M. L. L. L.

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it all the more because of their own insufficiency of leaders. Coligny stood out alone ; the other chief was a woman, the Queen of Navarre, while Condé, who should have been the Admiral's moral equal, was as unstable as he was brilliant. There is an interesting letter about him written near this date by Smith, the English envoy, to the Minister, Cecil, at home.

"Tell me your wishes," he writes, "without talking Greek and without the ambiguities of an oracle of Nostradamus. I have only a dense kind of mind and cannot guess riddles. The Prince de Condé is re-established in full authority ; but those who are most zealous for religion have become offended with him. His indifference and coldness about sacred things awaken their distrust. And then he has taken to going wild over women. In a short time, no doubt, he will declare himself hostile to God, to us, to himself. When he is once coaxed over by the Papists, it will not be long before he gives himself to Baal."

These dismal prognostications were happily not justified by events, and Condé continued, at any rate, faithful to his religion. But his want of ballast remained none the less conspicuous, and if he was as wax before the weaker sex, they did not let him off easily. One of them, the widow of the Maréchal de Saint-André, pursued him steadily and made him a present of her Château of Valéry-les-Sens as a solid token of her love. In a distracted moment he promised to become her husband, his tears for his first wife, the saintly Princess Eléonore, being long since dry. But he found another beauty more to his taste, the courtly Marquise de Roithelin ; and, marrying her, discarded the poor Maréchale, although he did not discard her Château. Such adventures were not to his credit, and his lack of moral steadiness was seriously damaging to his party. It caused a coldness between him and the austere Admiral, and it did at least something towards consolidating Catherine's new plan of campaign.

She went on tightening the reins to little purpose. The country, as she was aware, was not only disaffected but distraught. Misery prevailed throughout. It seems to us, as we read the diaries of those days, that there were then more natural portents, more terrible drougths and famines, more seasons of abnormal heat and cold, more comets, more floods, more earthquakes, than the world has ever known since. And now to the cruelties of Nature were added the cruelties of war, which lasted long beyond the moment. Catherine complained of them

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shortly after the Peace of Amboise, and, some three or four years later, her letter was still a true picture. "I do not believe," she wrote, "that there is a single creature in this world more disgusted and harassed by the pillage and atrocities committed by the mercenaries than I am—I, who am dying on my feet, dying of these very evils. Had things been even worse after the war than they actually are, they might have laid the blame upon the rule of a woman, yet they should, in honesty, blame nothing but the rule of men who want to play the part of Kings. Henceforth, if I am not further trammelled, I hope to prove that women show a stronger will to preserve their country than the persons who have brought it into its present condition; pray show my letter to such as talk to you on these matters, for this is the truth pronounced by the mother of the King."

She was never averse to a back-handed thrust at the Guises, whose power she resented, while she dreaded it. She knew well the coil of dangers brought about by factions, but she did not see that her double-barrelled policy ensured them. She fortified herself with orthodoxy; and yet it is curious to perceive how even now her own taste pulled her the other way. Whenever she got a chance, she tended towards that tolerance to which her large, cold intellect inclined her, and when she pursued the opposite policy it was the fear of Spain that drove her. "There is," she wrote about this time, "a strong rumour in Flanders that the Catholic King, my son-in-law, has resolved to establish the Inquisition there. If this report be true, I shall have to put up with what is; but I shall be much perturbed if the execution of these orders should work havoc in my son-in-law's affairs." When actions and thoughts do not accord, a coherent policy is impossible, but, as usual, confounding prudence with wisdom, Catherine worked only for the moment, currying favour with Philip while she disapproved of his measures. Peace was, in truth, her chief wish for her son's subjects, yet as she gave it with one hand, she sowed discord with the other.

War was bound to break out. Four years earlier, Nostradamus had prophesied that the peace, concluded at Amboise, would not last longer than six weeks. Astrologers are not always accurate, and it had lasted four months. But now the powder was laid and only awaited the match. This, as might be expected, was provided by Spain. A Protestant revolt in the Netherlands caused panic in the orthodox camp, and a rumour

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that Philip, on his way to the Low Countries, was to travel through Italy and interview both Emperor and Pope, gave Catherine solid cause for anxiety. A Catholic League might be forming in which France would have no place. Knowing that Philip still distrusted her as lukewarm, she tried to win his confidence by promising help against the rebels and raising 6,000 Swiss to be ready in case of need. The presence of the armed force made the Protestant leaders uneasy, and they summoned secret meetings at Châtillon and at Condé's house at Valéry. Their prospects were hotly discussed. Should they let Catherine take the offensive, or should they strike the first blow? Those who advocated the latter course had prepared a plan of campaign. They proposed that the King should be seized and the Cardinal de Lorraine banished from Court, while the formidable Swiss were to be surrounded and put to the sword. Coligny was strong against war, Andelot as vehemently for it; and Andelot carried the day.

But not at once. Negotiations still went on and there were attempts to patch up a peace. The Protestants, too, were secret in their arrangements and only gathered gradually, in groups of three or four. At one moment the Catholics seemed blind to any danger, at another, they grew suspicious and sent a deputation of spies to Châtillon. They found Coligny in his garden and returned with no more knowledge than they took. Catherine resumed her dual policy. Philip's distrust seemed in abeyance and his good humour surprised her. "I find it very strange," she wrote, "that he is now for ever preaching about the good understanding there is between us, seeing that when we ourselves sought him out at Bayonne he gave us so much of the cold shoulder that I thought he wished to give nothing else." She posed as his dearest friend, as Alva's confidante. She promised further aid for the Spanish army. At the same time she threw dust in Coligny's eyes. It was perhaps his weakness, now and later, that he was too willing to believe in her; her downright manner and good nature made it easy for him to do so. She cheered his spirits by allowing the King to receive an embassy from the German Princes which came to beg him to allow the preaching of the Gospel. But she took care to hold the balance even and to give the cue to her son, who was a docile pupil. The next day, "he most rudely rebuffed the Admiral" who was talking of the religious question. Encouraged by the reception of the Germans, Coligny was complaining bitterly of the inequality under which the Protestants suffered, when the

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King broke in. "To-day," he cried, "you wish to be our equals, to-morrow you will wish to be our masters and to chase us from the kingdom"; then, leaving the room, he ran to his mother. "I am of the Duke of Alva's mind. Heads like these are too high for the State," he said. His words had no serious meaning—they were but the hysterical outpour of a weak, impressionable nature acted upon by a strong one. It was the first of those strange sallies of his, afterwards fatally frequent; those moments when Catherine took possession of his nerves and he, usually gentle, spoke and acted, as it were, by her suggestion, in a kind of hypnotic excitement. There were ominous threats in the air. Revolutionary books and tracts appeared, and, among them, one to prove that it was right to kill a prince who persecuted Christianity. Catherine was menaced with assassination, so was Coligny. The time for temporizing was at an end.

The Huguenots had completed their arrangements and kept their counsel. By some unknown means, however, the Court, then at Monceaux, got wind that hostile schemes were afoot. There were alarming rumours that an armed force was marching against the King. The royal party took fright and, in undignified haste, moved to Meaux, where they shut themselves in and lost no time in summoning the Swiss Mercenaries. Had the Protestants struck at that moment, the course of history might have been changed; but, by the enemy's stratagems, Condé was duped and kept dallying until the arrival of the Swiss had made the King's position secure. The royal army now numbered 10,000, without the help promised by Spain; the Protestants were but 2,000 strong. All the more contemptible does it seem that panic should have again seized Catherine and her crew. Protestant recruits, they heard, were mustering, and the Regent's imagination already saw herself and Charles prisoners in the Huguenots' hands. It was the well-hated Cardinal de Lorraine, always the victim of bodily fear, who first counselled flight. There followed what was, perhaps, the most ignominious journey on historical record. The King, his mother, and the Court stole out of Meaux two hours before daybreak and joined the Swiss, who had preceded them, upon the road to Paris. Under this motley escort, who sang at the top of their voices and looked (says the Venetian Ambassador) like a troop of "disreputable street-porters," they hurried, terror-struck, to the capital—to arrive there at nightfall, "half dead with hunger and exhaustion." In after

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days, Charles, himself no coward by nature, could never bear to hear this expedition talked about and would fall into a fury at the mention of it. Meanwhile, the Protestants, balked of their prey, pursued it in vain. All that they achieved was to catch up the coward Cardinal's baggage and rob him of his gold and silver vessels, after which they lost no time in moving in his steps towards Paris. There followed a disastrous skirmish with the Swiss, who, in spite of their rabble appearance, fought like lions, and, disheartened by their failure, the Huguenots retired to re-constitute their plans.

Their objects still remained the same. They must secure the person of the King—they must put down the Guises at all costs. The result of their discussions was a daring resolve: they determined to blockade Paris, to harass it into capitulation. Encamping not far off, at Claye, for a month they bided their time, devastating the neighbourhood and seizing advantageous positions. For a month, within the city walls, the Constable shilly-shallied, still awaiting the Spanish reinforcements. Then the Royalists sent l'Hôpital—a measure that implies Catherine's hand—as an emissary to the Huguenot camp. The second time he met them, they presented him with a written statement of their requirements—no modest list of compromises, but a demand for unrestricted liberty of worship, for State privileges, for the calling of the States-General. One of these requests is suggestive. As an aristocracy, they claimed exemption from taxation—a pretention which contrasts strangely with the democratic nature of the Reformation movement in other countries. They made a worse blunder in urging the removal of Italians from the Court. Catherine was mortally offended, and a herald arrived in the camp who, with three solemn trumpet-blasts, summoned Coligny and Condé before their sovereign. Both of them refused to obey, but they saw fit to lower their tone and to make rather humbler conditions. The next move was from the Constable: he decided that he himself would meet his nephews. For the last time but one, the great old man figured on the stage, and he figured characteristically. He had resolved to be diplomatic, self-contained; but when, stiff in jewelled brocades, he confronted his three rebellious nephews, the men whom, in earlier years, he had been accustomed to rule like a despot, he lost his temper and loudly poured forth the vials of his wrath. Perhaps his ill-humour was not lessened by the signs that he saw of heresy, for Cardinal Odet stood before him dressed as a cavalier. Under such a

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choleric ambassador, negotiations proved to be impossible, and Anne de Montmorency parted from his nephews, never to speak to them again. There was no more idea of peace-making—battle was in the air. "In the city of Paris," writes Correro, the Venetian envoy, . . . "everything was confusion. According to the orders of the King and the example of the other ambassadors—of the priests, too, and the monks, who all put off their habits and flew to arms—I also armed my followers. And I kept water always ready in the street, because everybody was afraid of being burnt alive in their houses. . . . And I accustomed myself to wake up at every sound that reached my ears."

There ensued, in November, 1567, a terrible battle at Saint-Denis—a decisive victory for neither party, a massacre for each. The Constable died fighting hard (killed by Robert Stuart, a Scotchman, serving among the Huguenots), and his three sons, François, Thoré, and Méru, mournfully bore away his body from the field. They carried with them more than they knew—an epoch as well as a Prince: a dead echo of the dead Middle Ages. Anne de Montmorency had lived for grandeur, not for edification. He was the last great personage who united in himself the feudal tyrant with the modern Renaissance nobleman; the patriarch and robber with the patron. Past and present both lay within him, but not the future. Of that he knew nothing. Progress and liberty were not words in his vocabulary.

He died, as he had lived—dramatically. The bitter sight upon which his failing eyes closed was the momentary success of his enemies. Their troops, indeed, worked wonders. We have the account of them from a strange authority, the Turkish emissary, who was watching the scene from Montmartre. The Protestants, all dressed in white, were easily visible; their war-cry of "*L'Évangile!*" could be heard ringing loud where he stood. They were but a handful compared to their foes, but their feats of skill and strength amazed him. Coligny and his men fought their way to the walls of Paris. They entered the city; they burned down the Sainte-Chapelle, by the Admiral's relentless orders. They took the gorgeous vestments from the churches and made them into coats and breeches. The dreadful intoxication of action possessed all of them, even their generous leader.

We are apt to think of all this time as one of continuous Catholic tyranny, and, in the main, that is the truth. But the

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Catholics were not invariably the persecutors, and, in the brief hours of Huguenot victory, [they too had their turn of misery. It is interesting to catch a glimpse of them soon after Saint-Denis, when Condé and his regiments were despoiling the country, on their march to Montereau. Foe and friend alike were subjugated by the woman-conquering Condé. The Dame de Beauvais, "*dame d'honneur et fort catholique*,"^a hearing that the army of the rebel Prince was to pass near by, liberally offered him her house," on condition that he spared the church and clergy. It was well that her guest was chivalrous. Her Château held numbers of hidden priests, living huddled together in one room, fed by her own hand, in secret, and clad in the strangest disguises. Their distress and privations were great, and a word from Condé would have destroyed them. But he kept his faith, and went on his way without harming them.

The power of the Protestants was, however, a mere semblance, and Condé and Coligny were beset by innumerable difficulties. The chief question was what to do next. Spain had sent help to the enemy, and their own army, small enough to start with, was now miserably exhausted. There was but one source from which they could expect aid : the Elector Palatine's son, Duke Casimir, who was even now sending them troops. To compass a meeting with these Reiters seemed the best course open, in spite of the danger of the enemy's pursuit that this involved; and the Huguenot army set out towards the Meuse, the direction in which their allies were coming. It was winter, the cold was bitter, provisions were scarce. The young Prince, Henri of Anjou, and the Spanish soldiers were at their heels, and once, in the night, nearly overtook them. Yet they managed to cross the river safely and achieved the long-desired conjunction. The Germans brought wine and jollity ; there were feastings and jestings in the snow, and Coligny gladly allowed them ; but he himself stood apart, grave and perplexed, for he knew that though the arrival of the Reiters had solved one problem, they carried another with them.

That problem was the constant one—money. The Mercenaries, indeed, play the part of the devil in the military history of the sixteenth century, and, for the next twenty years, their cruelty and rapacity make the torment of either side and complicate every situation. They were unfortunately necessary evils in civil war, when neither party would have

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been strong enough without them. Coligny knew well that Casimir's men would instantly demand their pay and that there was nothing to give them. With his usual promptitude, he acted. Going over to the German camp, he spent six days negotiating and scheming. Then, returning to his own men, he made a public appeal to the whole army. There followed one of those scenes, peculiar to France, which make French history so dramatic. He gathered his hundreds in a field and, with Condé at his side, addressed them. He invoked the love of their country, the spirit of self-sacrifice, which alone could accomplish the impossible. With the tears running down his cheeks, he himself offered 500 crowns, a small fortune, in the cause. His speech was a *coup de morale*; the effect was instantaneous. A wave of emotion swept over the throng; the rich took off their chains and ear-rings; the rank and file offered coins; vessels of gold and silver were brought forth from the tents of the nobles. Eighty thousand livres had been collected, and the difficulty was at an end.

There was now no reason for delay and the word was given to set out once more for Paris—this time through the rich plains of Burgundy, for the better provisioning of the troops. Chartres was besieged en route by Condé, as a warning menace to Paris. But his operations did not get far. The arrival of the Reiters was a solid fact which had gone home to the Catholics. Catherine was alarmed and became anxious for conciliatory measures. There were parleyings and deputations, and the result was the Treaty of Longjumeau, which was, generally speaking, a fresh edition of the Edict of Amboise. It gave the Protestants liberty of worship, but it did not give them power.

Such as it was, however, it remained a feather in their cap. If it did not mean a thorough victory for themselves, it meant the discomfort of their adversaries. Catherine, from whom its concessions had been wrested, was beside herself at having to yield them. She sought about for a scapegoat, and found l'Hôpital ready to her hand. If he had not failed in his embassy at Saint Denis, all might still have been well. "It is you," she exclaimed angrily, "with your big words, moderation and justice, who have brought us to this pass!" The King, who was naturally fond of the courteous, philosophical Chancellor, wavered for a moment, then followed his mother's lead. "I will go into the Huguenots' houses," he cried, "I will creep into their beds to take them, I will seek out those



CHARLES, CARDINAL DE LORRAINE.

BIBLIOTHÈQUE DES ARTS ET MÉTIERS.

ANONYME.

From a photograph by J. Giraudon.

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who will give them up. Henceforth I will lay down the law as I like, both for great and small."

His boast was ominous. The new-created League of the Holy Ghost was a formidable agent of persecution, and so were the Catholic "Fraternities"; indeed they threatened at one moment to depose the King unless he authorized the general destruction of heretics. There were massacres of Protestants in many provincial towns, and sinister reports were afloat. Not the least was that of the Papal Nuncio, after he came away from a private conversation with Catherine. "She and His Majesty," he said, "had nothing more at heart than one day to catch the Admiral and his followers, and to make of them a general slaughter that should not be forgotten."

Such a speech, though it may have been spoken in the wordy heat of temper, was none the less of evil augury for the future. None had ever succeeded in piercing the mask that Catherine wore; but sometimes, at unguarded moments, the storm-winds of political passion blew to the surface stray seeds that gave evidence of the thoughts germinating in the depths of her dark and subtle nature.

"*La Reine, désirant la mort des grands, est contente de celle du connétable,*" such was the comment of shrewd old Tavannes, the Royalist historian; and "*la Reine, désirant la mort des grands*" is no mere phrase, but henceforth the key to her hidden policy. Murder and battle had delivered her from Guise and Montmorency; she herself would find means to get rid of Coligny and Condé. The Cardinal de Lorraine, it is true, remained; but he was rather a mischief-maker than a despot, a master-intriguer than a leader. No man wrought more evil with his brain, was so well-hated both by friend and foe, as this "tiger of France," as he was called. He and the plots that he hatched were among the main sources of bad government. "As long as the Cardinal de Lorraine is at Court, the peace will not be kept," said Condé. "I will go myself to fetch him, and, with his own blood, I will dye his robes deep scarlet." Condé's words gave voice to the wishes of many, not only among the Cardinal's opponents. But Catherine would not have echoed them. To her he was courtly and urbane, and she did not find him in her way. As for his nephew, Duke Henri, the head of the House, he was too young as yet to cause her any serious alarm.

One measure she took to secure herself against fresh tyranny—she abolished the great office of the Constable, and made

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her son, Henri of Anjou, a boy of fifteen, Lieutenant-General of the realm. In doing so she satisfied her prudence, but also her maternal pride, for Anjou was the only one of her children that she not only loved but adored, not only adored but feared. The Prince had great soldiers to advise him—foremost among them, Strozzi, Brissac and the elder Tavannes; he had brilliant military gifts of his own and, in those days, a gallant presence; and he also had strong ambitions—the strongest among them, perhaps, the desire to eclipse his brother, the King. Nor had he long to wait before his talents were put to the test.

The Treaty of Longjumeau had been but a shadow and war was only waiting to break out again. Indeed it had never really ceased during the six months of the so-called peace. The refusal of the Protestant stronghold, La Rochelle, to receive a Catholic Governor was a good pretext for offence, and in the summer of 1568, troops began to reappear without warning all over the country. They had mustered, it was said, to guard the Southern frontier and to reduce La Rochelle; but Coligny, then at Châtillon, suspected other reasons. He was right to do so. Catherine had given orders to Tavannes to seize both the Admiral and Condé, though the blame of the deed was to fall on him. They were to be trapped in a circling ring of enemies, without possibility of escape, after which they could with ease be made to disappear, and then, free of "*les grands*," she would rule in peace. Small wonder that Tavannes, under such commands, was so well qualified to epitomize his royal mistress's theory of government. It was the sudden appearance of an Italian, who took up his abode near Châtillon, that first aroused Coligny's fears. He moved to Noyers, in Burgundy, where he joined the Prince de Condé. Unknown handwritings warned them of their danger—and, if report says true, that of Tavannes himself was among them. At any rate, he contrived to dally in the execution of his orders until he gave them time to depart.

In the meantime they had not been idle. They had tried every dignified means of protest. "God will not leave unpunished the shedding of so much innocent blood," Coligny had written to Catherine. The Edicts were wantonly abused—it could not go on for ever. "You may have the good will," he ironically concluded, "but you certainly have not the power." He and Condé, a month later, drew up a full statement of their wrongs and the wrongs of the men who followed them. They accused Catherine of her last plot to take and kill

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them ; they ended with a prayer for retribution ; a demand that justice might be done on the Cardinal de Lorraine, " the source, root and origin of the ruin . . . which menaces the Crown."

Condé gave out that he meant to await an answer to this appeal, but that same night he and Coligny slipped away and set out for La Rochelle. It was one of the saddest times of the Admiral's life, for a little while before these events, his beloved wife, Charlotte, had died. They had gone through joy and grief—they had faced adversity and persecution with one another. During the last years of absence and warfare, Coligny had lived much away from her, but fate, for once, had been kind to him, and just before the battle of Saint Denis, he had snatched a few days' rest with her at Châtillon.

He was allowed little leisure for mourning. When he and Condé started, there was no time to be lost. It was a strange Scriptural journey. The families of both were with them—their safety lay in being together—and the men had to make great part of the expedition on foot. Coligny guided the party—heavy with sorrow—his four little children by his side ; while Condé, with a baby in his arms, walked in front, in exalted mood. His wife, the Marquise, ill and unaccustomed to hardship, leaned on his arm ; his young family followed with Madame d'Andelot, who was also carrying her child. And behind him came the rest of the company, steadily marching in silence. Like Israel, they were pursued, and when they approached the river Loire, the enemy was close upon them. But, at the crucial moment, " it lowered its floods to let them pass " (the old Chronicler's paraphrase of the ford they found at Sancerre), and they reached the other bank in safety. Their danger, however, was not over, for hardly had they touched the shore, when their enemies appeared opposite. But the Loire was evidently a river of the Protestant persuasion. It rose in a flood so high that the French Pharaoh and his hosts were balked until too late, and remained swearing upon the bank. The Huguenots, watching breathlessly, had fallen upon their knees, and, with one accord, they burst into the psalm, " When Israel came out of Egypt and the House of Jacob from among a strange people." They were out of reach of their foe, they could go on their way unmolested.

So they travelled onward with fresh heart, now beset by hardship and peril, now cheered by the gallant gentlemen of Berri who gathered in force to recruit them. The women and children were near dropping with weariness, the men sinking

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for want of food, when at last the towers of their city of refuge showed dark upon the sky-line, and La Rochelle and safety lay before them. The first days of September saw the whole band within its walls, where they were soon joined by Jeanne d'Albret and her son, Henri, then some fifteen years old. They made together a little Huguenot Court, where Jeanne reigned as Queen, picturesque enough, and serious as well as picturesque; an old Testament community with the traditions of the French noblesse. And she, austere though she was, had something of the histrionic instinct. Now she was the Roman Matron, and, with her own hand, armed her son, in the presence of the assembled army—a proclamation of his manhood; now, again, she played the royal mistress, ordering a score of gold chains to be fashioned with pendant medals. "*Ou paix assurée, ou victoire entière, ou mort honneste*" was graven on them, and she gave them to the friends she honoured most. Coligny wore one on his hat; it was found there when his clothes were ransacked upon the Eve of St. Bartholomew.

The Queen of Navarre was the best statesman at La Rochelle. When the funds of the Huguenots ran low and their resources seemed at an end, it was she who suggested a sale of ecclesiastical property throughout the Protestant provinces and thus replenished the treasury. England, too, sent money and gunpowder, and help was promised by Germany. There also came to La Rochelle to see Coligny, an important visitor, Louis of Nassau, the brother and the messenger of William of Orange: a fresh strength to the cause, for within a few months he and his Netherlandish troops were fighting in the field with the Admiral.

The plot against Coligny's life—its discovery—his escape—were facts which in themselves constituted a declaration of war, to be followed, not long after, by a vigorous decree commanding all Protestant ministers to leave the kingdom in fifteen days on pain of death. Nevertheless, with La Rochelle as the basis of their operations, the outlook of the Huguenots was hopeful. Their army was better than it had been. The free-lances, the looters and the rabble who had hitherto sought adventure in their ranks had by now dropped away, and the majority of their fighters were strenuous believers in their cause. "They left wife, child and home," writes one who lived then, "with a joy and an ardour incredible;" they had faith in their leaders and in themselves.

Those leaders had gradually, perhaps unconsciously, shifted

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their ground and, as far as Condé was concerned, increased the scope of their aims. It now became clear that if Charles were deposed, it was Condé who would reign in his stead. He was a Prince of the Blood and a Prince of "the Religion"; the Huguenots already called him "*Le Roi des fidèles*," a name not calculated to quell ambition. And in former days, when Condé's creed was not so stable and he showed signs of veering towards Catholicism, Coligny himself had kept him faithful to his party by urging his inalienable right to the Crown, which the Protestants would support if they could not gain their ends by other means. Once granted that a Catholic King was no King, Condé's claims became a valid reality, and though he had not put them in words till events gave them life, the thought of them had, in all probability, long lain dormant in his mind. His pretensions exasperated Catherine and lent an added note of enmity to her hostile attitude. It was already one of hatred; for there is no feeling so bitter as that which involves a thwarted sentiment, and Catherine was, after all, a woman. Condé was the one man, except her husband, who had roused some warmth, some coquetry, within her; there was a moment when it seemed as if she almost loved him, and her vengeance was now the acuter. If we are to believe what the Spanish envoy told Philip, she went so far as to employ a magician to work against him and his cousins, Coligny and Andelot. "An Italian offered this Queen to kill the Prince of Condé, the Admiral and Andelot from Paris . . . for six months he has been closeted in a room with a German craftsman he brought from Strasburg, and he has had him make three bronze figures of the Prince of Condé, the Admiral and Andelot, full of screws in the joints and breasts with which to work the arms, thighs, faces, and hair—which is very abundant and turns upwards. Day after day the Italian does nothing but study their birth and, with an astrolabe, he turns and untuns the screws." When Condé died, it was said that the bronze thigh showed mortal symptoms, and so it was, a few months later, with Andelot's image. The only blunder that happened concerned the Admiral; for when his "statue" followed the example of the others, his death was almost instantly reported—without any effect upon himself. There were many methods of inciting to murder in those times, and Catherine, if a superstitious woman, was also a very clever one, who knew the full value of what we to-day should call suggestion.

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Her wrath did not only fall upon the military leaders of the Huguenots. She determined to purge the Court of any heretical element, and chose this moment, when hostilities were reopening, to resolve upon l'Hôpital's dismissal. She had a twofold end in view: the obvious one, to get rid of a Minister who was more than half a Protestant; the other, and the stronger, to remove him from the King. If Catherine had one clear plan it was to allow no influence near her son but her own, to permit him to get fond of no one—and he had once more grown fond of the Chancellor. It was her resolve to replace him by a creature of hers, an Italian, her crafty favourite, Gondi, and she took her usual course. It was one which was to become only too common in the years to be. Catherine, insensible herself, had a heartless perception of other people's sensibilities. From his boyhood upwards, she had known exactly what would lash up Charles' nerves, and she had never scrupled to use her knowledge. Now she stood at his elbow working upon him. The autocratic boy, whom she had imbued with the doctrine of Divine Right of Kings, was pursued by one bugbear—the fear of rebellion. Catherine told him that l'Hôpital was a rebel, that he was a confederate of the Huguenots, that they would destroy his State. "I have no more doubts," Charles exclaimed, "of the truth of their damned intention to establish a kingdom within this kingdom—my kingdom the which God hath ordained." L'Hôpital, after yielding the Seals, was summarily dismissed; and with him departed from the Court the last hope of a tolerant policy.

Between Charles and his mother there was no sympathy. She fascinated him and he feared her, but he never loved her. "His respect for her was admirable—a filial respect which might even bear the name of fear," said the subtle Venetian envoy. Nor had she any affection for him. All her feeling went to her next son, her idol, Henri d'Anjou, and her dominant wish was his aggrandizement. He was not puny and shrinking, or morbidly sensitive, like Charles. He was brilliant, audacious, effective; his youth lent him the glamour of romance and he eclipsed the King in the eyes of the public. Charles' jealousy of his younger brother amounted to something like hatred, and he never forgave his appointment as Lieutenant-General of the realm. For if there was one thing Charles was proud of, one path to glory that he felt he could tread, it was that of military prowess, and he knew

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that with Anjou in the field there would be no room for him.

Henri d'Anjou soon won his spurs. The autumn had passed in slight skirmishes and indecisive actions, and the winter stopped all fighting for some time. Early in March a big engagement seemed imminent. Anjou had sent word to his mother at Paris. He "had brought the Huguenots to such extremities," he said, "that in a few days they would be forced into a battle." Before that event, he begged to have the honour of seeing her and the King; for then, if envious fortune destined him for death, he felt that he should die the less sorrowfully. "You can fancy whether or no these words touched the heart of my mother," writes Princess Margot. "She suddenly resolved to depart with the King . . . and with the usual little troop—Madame de Retz, Madame de Sauve and myself. Borne on the wings of her wishes, she covered the road between Paris and Tours in three and a half days—not without some inconvenience and a great many accidents: absurd accidents, too, because the Cardinal de Bourbon insisted on coming. Indeed, he never could let her alone; and yet it must be owned that his humour and his temperament were not created for arduous doings. When we arrived at Plessis-les-Tours, we found my brother there, together with the chiefs of his army, the flower of France. In the presence of all these he forthwith made the King an oration, rendering an account of his charge and all he had done since he left the Court. And he made it with such art, and with so eloquent a grace, that every one there admired it greatly, the more so for that his great youth contrasted with his wise words—better suited to a grey-beard than to a boy of sixteen. What my mother felt no words can tell, for, in truth, she loved him uniquely. . . . But discretion shows nothing it does not wish to show, and she, moderating her gestures . . . and qualifying her praise . . . only took such points in his speech as concerned the facts of the war . . . for she wanted to discuss them with the Princes . . . and to settle on a course of action."

The result was that on March 12, 1569 the two armies found themselves near Jarnac, facing each other on either side of the Loire. It was the last night of Condé's life. He had already been slightly wounded in some unimportant raid, but that did not check his gallant spirit and he was as mercurial as ever, giving orders, or conferring with Coligny, now in gay and now in solemn mood. There is an evening prayer composed by

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him for his men which he must have said as usual that night. Its words evoke a stirring last vision of him : of the darkness, broken here and there by torch or lantern ; of the white gleam of the tents ; of rude armed men upon their knees ; of the fiery little Captain, kneeling in their midst. And this prayer, which shows the best side of him, makes no unfitting close to his career.

" Oh Lord God ! " it runs, " For that Thou hast created the night unto man's repose and hast ordered that the day serve for his labours ; and, more especially, for that it hath pleased Thee to choose us to watch this night, so that we may assure the repose of others ; we implore of Thee very humbly, in the Name and by the goodness of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, not to allow that any one of this Company, commanded now to watch, should fall into a sleep which should be harmful to those who rest upon our faith and vigilance. And give us Thy grace that we may acquit ourselves loyally of our duty under the Chiefs and Captains whom Thou hast set over us. Above all, Lord, hold our hands, that the sleep of sin may not seize our souls and make us do some base thing under the cloak of darkness ; grant, rather, that when we consider how Thy light pierces through the thickest shadows in the world, even unto the inmost depth of the heart, we may ever have the fear of Thy Name before our eyes, so that we may discover and hinder all evil doings undertaken in the night by any man, whosoever he be, according to our charge and commission."

Henri d'Anjou, meanwhile, had passed the night in active preparations. He had planned a master-move, and directly the moon had risen high enough to light him, while his enemy's troops lay fast asleep, he and his army silently crossed the river by an old stone bridge, a dire surprise next day for the waking eyes of the Huguenots. In the chill of the glimmering dawn, Anjou resorted to *his* devotions. He knelt upon the ground before a priest and received the Holy Communion ; then passionately charged his men that Condé must be killed before nightfall. " The King of the faithful " was too perilously near the throne to live.

Early in the fight, which began with the morning, Condé's leg was broken, but he still led on valiantly. " *Noblesse française !* " he cried, " here is the long-desired moment. Remember the condition in which Louis de Bourbon goes to fight for Christ and for his country." He was but paraphrasing the motto which stood embroidered on his banner : " *Doux le*

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péril pour Christ et le pays." The slaughter about him was appalling, and grew worse as he grew more helpless. "There was nothing left for him but death," says an eye-witness, d'Aubigné; "all his men struggled for the honour of making a rampart for him with their bodies. An old man, one Captain Lavergne, let himself be killed with fifteen of his sons and nephews. He had brought twenty-five into the field. Of a sudden, hit by a ball, Condé's horse fell under him, and he had no strength left to get up and mount upon another." He was on the instant surrounded, but recognizing two faces that he knew among his captors, he gave himself up to them upon their solemn promise of his life. His safety was, however, not in their power; Anjou had not spoken in vain. At that moment there rode up his emissaries, headed by his creature, Montesquiou. "Kill him, kill him!" they shouted, as they came. "You cannot save me," said Condé calmly to his guard, and hardly had he spoken, when Montesquiou shot him in the back. He fell at once, lifeless, to the ground and his body was carried to Anjou. The young Lieutenant-General was flushed with triumph, for the victory of the Catholics had been complete, even without this crowning trophy. He acted promptly. Past were the generous days of Dreux when François de Guise captured Condé and begged him to share his tent and bed. The age of Anjou was insolently decadent; he aimed at perverse effects. The dead Prince was slung, by his orders, head downwards across an ass, and carried to the parish Church of Jarnac. Near by there stood the house where Anjou was lodging, and here before a pillar, on a bare stone, the body was exposed all day to the laughter of the mob.

There he lay—

Le petit homme tant joli
Qui toujours chante, toujours rit
Et toujours baise sa mignonne—
Dieu garde de mal le petit homme.

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and round him stood the same crowd that had sung that song in the days when they had loved him, not so long ago. The verse might stand for the half of his epitaph. The other half is harder to express. Condé was a Frenchman among Frenchmen, so histrionic that he could change his parts with meteoric quickness and could not help playing up to an occasion—identifying himself with it. Like other histrionic people, he demanded a change of emotions, and was both fickle and sincere. At one moment brilliant as a comet and witty with

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the salt of Gallic wit ; at another, filled with religious exaltation and as zealous as any Covenanter ; " brave and light and fatal to those who needed him," yet transmitting to them all the magnetic thrill of his own mood—this was Louis, Prince de Condé. " He died upon the bed of honour," said Jeanne d'Albret, when she heard of the tragedy at Jarnac. Her words, also, should stand upon the grave of "*le petit homme tant joli*."

It was not only the eye-witnesses at Jarnac who watched the drama of Condé's end. Catherine was lying dangerously ill of a fever at Metz, the town where she happened to be staying. She had been visiting its Convents, had caught a prevailing epidemic, and the doctors gave but little hope. It is the Princess Marguerite, herself there, who gives us the description of what followed.

" Round her bed," she writes, " stood King Charles, my brother, and my sister and brother of Lorraine, and divers gentlemen of the Council, and many ladies and gentlemen who thought she was at the point of death and would not abandon her. And she, dreaming, kept telling what she saw, all in order, as it happened. . . . ' Look how they flee ! ' she cried suddenly. ' My son has the victory. *Hé, mon Dieu*, set my son on his feet again—he has fallen ! Do you see the Prince de Condé ?—he is dead in that hedge ! ' All who were present thought that she was dreaming and that, since she knew my brother meant to give battle, it was the thought of that which haunted her. But a few nights after, there came Monsieur de Losses with the news of the victory—deeming that he brought most welcome tidings which deserved great reward at her hands. ' You are tedious to come waking me for that,' was all she said. ' I knew it well already, did I not see it all ? ' "

It was not the first time that such things had happened to her. The night before her husband had been killed she had dreamed the whole scene—the tournament, his sudden end—and, the next day, had urgently implored him not to fight. In later years, when the Cardinal de Lorraine had died, he, too, it was said, appeared to her ; and again, before the death of each of her children, she dreamed of a shooting flame—a vision she never saw at other times. Nowadays we should call her mesmeric, and psychical societies would investigate her manifestations. Then they were held to be prophecies and they lent her a greater authority.

The King received the news of the victory in bed. The

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tidings threw him into one of his strange states of nervous excitement. "My greatest enemy is dead!" he cried, then rising, he "fell on his bare knees, offered up a prayer . . . and throwing on a dressing-gown, he rushed off to the Queen-Mother." When he had cooled down, he had leisure to reflect that Jarnac meant glory for his brother as well as for his country; and he feebly tried to wrest for himself a faint show of royal authority by refusing to Anjou some cannon which the young Commander claimed as his right. Words rose high between them, and the episode, slight enough in itself, threatened to assume a dire import; it was the opening scene of the feud which henceforth embittered their relations.

Coligny had long been the real chief of the Huguenots, and Condé's death made him also their official leader. But it is, once more, significant of the aristocratic nature of the French Reformation, that the army, not content with a nobleman, demanded a Prince as its General. Jeanne d'Albret was equal to the moment. She hastened to the camp, and appeared there with her son and the young Prince de Condé. Taking Henri de Navarre by the hand, "with an eloquent grace, with resolution that was tempered by sorrow," she presented him to the assembled troops. His head bared, the boy took a solemn oath that he would never desert the cause. The soldiers caught fire; with a loud shout, they repeated his words and then, amidst enthusiastic plaudits, they proclaimed the Prince as their Commander. The appointment, however, was rather nominal than real. Coligny remained none the less in authority, and young Navarre did practically nothing except learn his business. He and his comrade, Henri de Condé, became devoted to their chief, and far from being famous as Captains, they were known as "the Admiral's Pages."

In spite of the Huguenots' discomfiture, they did not lose courage and Coligny speedily set about the reorganization of his army. Catherine had yet to learn that she could not strangle an idea; she continued to believe that by killing a man you could kill a movement, and the plots round Coligny thickened. There is more than rumour to attest them, for the despatches to Philip give us ample evidence of their existence.

While she was still at Metz, the Spanish envoy, Alava, had audience of her. He was in no smooth humour, for he thought she had not followed up her advantage and reproached her with some bitterness for the Catholics' inaction. It had, he asserted,

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given Coligny leisure to put his troops on a new footing. Catherine broke in impatiently that that was not the danger, for the Admiral had no place in his power but La Rochelle ; the real peril lay elsewhere. " I live in constant fear," she ended, " lest he should deliver it to the English. Besides, the Queen of Navarre is entirely governed by him, and she it is who is ruining us. Of your charity, advise me what to do !"— " When force fails, one must turn to other means." " What means ? " " Well, then, since you will have it, you must have recourse to '*la Sonaria*,' as the Italians call it, and you must get Coligny killed, as well as La Rochefoucauld and Grammont." And lowering his voice, for the Cardinal de Lorraine was in the next room—" Three days since," he continued, " I offered fifty thousand crowns to the man who would kill the Admiral, and twenty or thirty thousand to those who would kill Andelot and La Rochefoucauld. It is seven years ago since their death was first resolved on, and they who hindered it then have lived to repent their decision." Catherine answered no word and the conversation came to an end.

But Alava did not let matters rest there. Not long after this he had another talk with her upon the subject and complained, as usual, of her easy-going conduct towards the Huguenots. " There is one thing you do not know," she exclaimed, " and yet it is the absolute truth ; I have no longer the same authority that I used to have in the Council. My sons are men now. The King has good judgment and, for these last four months, he claims to act solely at his own dictation. It is the same with his brother, the Duc d'Anjou, and I have not the high hand in affairs that once was mine." But a fox had been set to catch a fox. " You will not make me believe that," replied Alava. " If you and your prudence were not at the helm, your sons would be in great danger . . . Still, everything that you have achieved will be wasted if you do not put a good end to the whole matter. Won't you finish, once for all, with the Admiral ? " . . . As he spoke, he held her fast by her mantle. " Never dare to say such a thing again ! " she answered, looking meaningly at him, as if she would make him understand that she herself thought exactly as he did. Her counsels were silent, but they were sure, and she and the Spaniard were well-matched.

Yet, though murder was in the air, Coligny still remained unscathed. Not so his beloved brother, Andelot, who died

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rather suddenly at Saintes, in May of this same year. With such rumours as prevailed throughout the country it was natural that poison should have been suggested as the cause of his end. And it is more than probable that this was so ; that he fell the victim of some Spanish plot which had been tacitly accepted by Catherine. But there is no proof of the fact, or, indeed, of anything more than of a short and fatal illness—and violent illnesses were more common then than now, more mysterious, because less understood. Yet it is hard for us to discard suspicion, the more so that, barely two years later, Cardinal Odet followed Andelot. He had gone to England in 1569, to treat with Queen Elizabeth, and it was in London that death unexpectedly overtook him. Whether there was poison or not is hardly the main issue. If the two brothers were not actually assassinated, they certainly might have been, and that without any serious shock to public opinion.

The death of Andelot, the Colonel-General of the Infantry, the gifted soldier, the impulsive man and loyal friend, was a tragedy for his party—a heavy blow to the Admiral. For Andelot was the brother whom he loved best, who was the most like him : Andelot whom his comrades called the *chevalier sans peur*, to which history may well add "*sans reproche*." And this calamity was closely followed by the death of Coligny's eldest son. The accumulation of his griefs upon the death of his wife—the loss first of Condé, then of Andelot, and now of his boy—told upon his nature and the iron entered into his soul. That summer he fought grimly, and we read something like despair in the awful rigour of his commands when he went to Périgord, to punish the Catholics for their barbarous slaughter of the Provençaux. A cruelty foreign to his nature was apparent in his vengeance, and it did not bring him luck. Till then, helped by William of Orange and his Netherlandish troops, and supported by William's brother, Louis of Nassau, the Huguenots had been fairly successful. But now, more or less, disaster followed them : at Poitiers, which Coligny tried to take ; in his efforts to save Chatellerault ; in a final engagement at Montcontour. His army was ridden with disease ; he himself, dangerously ill, gave his orders in weak tones from a litter ; while Anjou held his own in the valley of the Loire, and the rival favourite, young Henri de Guise, won his spurs in the Catholic cause.

Anjou was anxious for a battle : Coligny, knowing the inadequacy of his forces, was bent upon avoiding it. His

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army, however, went against him, and, a pitched encounter once within sight, their insistence overruled his wisdom. The result was the battle of Montcontour, on October 3, 1569, one of the most drastic defeats that the Protestants ever underwent. At one time it had seemed as if they would gain the victory, for Coligny in person, with his men-at-arms, had charged the Catholic Reiters and badly wounded their leader. But, at the crucial moment, he had been hit, and, half choked with blood, was compelled to leave the field, bowed down with despondency, for "he knew that upon him would rest the blame, while no man would speak of his merits; since this is the common fate of all men who lead the people."

When the fight was over, "they bore him, worn by fever, in a litter. As they did so, L'Estrange, a gentleman stricken with years, travelling in the same fashion, and also wounded, had his litter set down in front of the other. Then putting forth his head between the curtains, he looked long in silence at his chief. And with tears in his eyes he parted from him, saying, 'Yes, it is true that God is gracious.' Whereupon they bade farewell to one another, closely united in thought, though unable to say any more in words." But Coligny went on his way refreshed. L'Estrange had called him "*mon ami*," and the word struck home. "The great Captain confessed to his familiars that this same little word of "friend" had renewed his spirit and set him once more on the road of goodly thoughts."

These sentences, jotted down by a contemporary, are bare enough, but L'Estrange's ejaculation brings before us the countenance that he beheld more vividly than any long description, and transmits down the centuries the power of goodness. This force it was which made Coligny an inaccessible mystery to Catherine, for of spiritual authority she recked nothing. In her eyes power meant prestige—the laurels which at that moment crowned her son, the brilliant victor of Jarnac and Montcontour.

Every power was working against the Admiral, both in secret and in public. Anjou's Captain of the Guards bribed a valet of Coligny's to do in private what was not done in battle and to put an end to his master by poison. The plot failed, but worse dangers menaced him from without. A large reward was offered for his apprehension, and he was condemned to be strangled in the Grèves and hanged on the gibbet of Montfauçon, like any common criminal of Paris. His property was confiscated, his children (and Andelot's children too) were proclaimed

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to be *infâmes*, no longer noble, incapable of holding any office. Every ignominy that his enemies could devise was allotted to him.

That Coligny should not in this critical hour give up hope was a fresh proof of his indomitable spirit. He inspired his fallen men; he pressed on to unexpected victories. To effect a junction with his colleague, Montgomery, was his first aim, and he accomplished it. He travelled southwards with young Navarre and Condé—“*Le Voyage des Princes*” his march was called—and he won battles against immense odds in the south, the chief of them at Arnay-le-Duc. La Noue, his famous Captain, backed his leader with further successes, and more potent than these visible triumphs was the moral victory that they meant. They were no mere military episodes, but the sign of an inward force which gave the Huguenots a stronger position than any blazing feat of conquest and deeply impressed their opponents.

Whether or no Coligny would have finally retrieved his material fortunes, it is not possible to say; for at this juncture, in the spring of 1570, Catherine took fright. She had no money for the Mercenaries who were clamouring for payment; she feared that Elizabeth was about to intervene on Coligny's behalf—that his German allies would invade France; and she knew that the cessation of warfare was the only security of the throne.

Coligny himself had made overtures of peace nearly a twelve-month before. He, too, saw clearly that, without it, the ruin of France would be inevitable. Happily Jeanne de Navarre, his right hand, more headstrong and more obdurate than he, was of the same mind, and active communications began between these two and the Queen-Mother. The terms of peace took long to discuss, for this time Coligny was uncompromising in his requirements, and it was not till August, 1570, that the Treaty of St. Germain was ratified. It was the finest victory that the Protestants had won. The Admiral had demanded liberty of conscience for all; liberty of worship in such towns as were already Protestant; the admission of Protestants to public offices on equal terms with the Catholics; and the King's full acknowledgment that the Protestants were his “very loyal subjects.” More than this, “four places of safety” were to be handed over to them for two years as a guarantee of the Royal faith: La Rochelle to guard the sea; La Charité, as a key to the centre; Montauban and Cognac in the south.

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Small wonder that the much-tried Huguenots, long accustomed to shifty compromise, to Treaties of Amboise and Longjumeau, should now feel that they had reached security : that the men who had fought so strenuously, with hardly a pause for four years, should at last return to their homes to thank God for the freedom they had won.

CHAPTER IV

The Princess Margot and the Duc d'Anjou

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THERE comes to every man a crucial period when he begins to feel old ; when the generation of his contemporaries, the generation which has bulked large for him, passes away and that of younger men takes its place. All the great personages in Catherine's life, excepting Coligny, had vanished : François, Duc de Guise, the Constable, Antoine de Navarre, Condé, the two Châtillons ; men who but a short time ago had filled the stage before her eyes. And their sons were already the popular heroes of the hour. Henri de Guise, Henri de Navarre, Henri de Condé, all three handsome, gifted and ambitious, were the actors with whom lay the future.

It was natural, therefore, that Catherine, now fifty-one, should feel autumnal. But more than years, sorrow had come to age her. In 1568, Spain and France were plunged in mourning by the death of the Queen of Spain, after she had given birth to a son. " She died," said Brantôme, " in the most pleasant April of her years." The brightness of her gloomy husband's life—the mother of two baby girls, now left to the mercies of Spanish etiquette—the hope and joy of her subjects—she had long been separated from France. Yet it kept a tender memory of the Princess who had left it while she was still a child. And it is thus that we like best to remember her, as the sparkling little princess at her father's Court, the playfellow of Mary Queen of Scots. Only just before her death, Mary, already a prisoner, had written her a letter recalling the happy old days, and the note is so full of pathos and romance, so redolent of the tragic fate of both young Queens in the flower of their years, that it seems to find its fitting place here.

" Madam, my sweet sister," it runs, " I cannot tell you the pleasure that I have had now, in a time so misfortunate for me, from your loving and comfortable letters. They seemed to be sent me by God to console me among the many troubles and adversities which now hem me in on every side. see in all

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well that I must praise Him for that we were bred up together in our youth—the which is the cause of our indissoluble friendship. And, on your part, you prove it to me truly. But, alas! how am *I* to show my revenge, unless it be by loving and by honouring you? And would that I had but the means, as I have the will to serve you! I have had it, in sooth, all my life!”

The news of her old comrade's death must have brought a heavy heart to Mary Stuart, but weightier sorrows soon effaced it. It was not so with Catherine. To her, the loss of her daughter was a shock from which she never quite recovered, a blow to her Spanish policy, as well as to softer feelings. Elizabeth had been the child who had satisfied her ambitions, in whom her pride had been so great that she sometimes took it for intensity of love. And there had been little to replace it; for her second girl, Claude de Lorraine, she cared nothing, and her unmarried daughter, Marguerite, had hitherto been unimportant in her eyes. This, however, was to be changed, and that Princess, far the cleverest of the family and the only strong character among them, was now to acquire a prominence which soon threatened to be alarming. The promotion which gave her opportunity was sudden. It was due, as she piquantly describes, to the orders issued by Anjou, at that moment, her favourite brother; and it was these two who for the next few years made all the mischief among the rising generation at Court.

The King, in playful contempt, had nicknamed his sister “Margot,” a popular, but not too dignified sobriquet, and the name clung to her as by right. She was now fifteen years of age and, unfledged though she was, she had a wit and a style of her own. She had, besides, the real instinct for letters which made her something more than a Princess of smart tongue and lent interest to what she said and thought. “When,” wrote one who knew her well, “she set about reading a book, however long and thick, she never stopped for a moment till the end of it, and oftentimes she abandoned sleep and food for its sake.” “Nature,” said the same chronicler, “used her rarer, subtler spirits in the fashioning of this lady. . . . But her beauty was made rather to ruin and to damn men than to save them.” Its spell did not lie in her features. Even the Court sycophants of her day admit that her chin was underhung—“the family chin,” an envoy calls it. “Her mouth laughed;” her hair was “very black like her father's” (although it often changed colour according to her wigs, and ambassadors grew

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high-flown about its gold) ; her complexion was as dazzling as the complexions of past princesses are wont to be. Yet with due allowance for hyperbole, she must have been a figure to remember—in “ her deep-red velvet, the colour of a Spanish carnation ”—the dress in which she had herself painted ; and in “ the little white veil, which was neither too big nor too small,” but just the right size to bewitch men. Bold, brilliant, mendacious and shrewd, before her mother she had always been inarticulate. Like Charles, half hypnotized by her, she dreaded the violent outbursts of temper to which Catherine was prone. It had been the same with the little Queen of Spain, who once told Brantôme that she never got a letter from her mother without trembling all over before she opened it, lest it should contain an angry word because of some offence, unwittingly given. And the Princess Margot felt the same terrors. “ It was not only that I dared not speak to her,” she said, “ but when she looked at me, I almost died of fright, lest I had said something to displease her. I went, indeed, near to answering her as Moses answered God when he saw the burning bush—‘ Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh ? . . . Send, I pray Thee, by the hand of whom Thou wilt send.’ ” Perhaps she remembered the beatings that were prescribed for her, when she was but eight years old, for remaining a staunch Catholic at a time when her elders leaned towards heresy. But Anjou knew well what would serve him, and he had singled her out for his purpose. How he did so is best told in her own words, as it happened, shortly before the battle of Jarnac, when Catherine had come from Paris to see her son and he had made his great speech before the Court.

“ My brother of Anjou,” she writes, “ begged me to take a walk with him in a green alley, apart, and, once there, he spoke thus to me : ‘ My sister, our relationship, and the bread we have so often broken together, alike compel us to love one another. You may have noticed that of my brothers and sisters you are the one of all the others to whom I would choose to do well. And I see that you are so made as to feel the same affinity for me. Till to-day, Nature has guided us on our road and we have had no other end but the joy of talking together. That was well enough for our childhood, but the time for childish things has passed away. You know the great and goodly offices to which God has called me, and for which the Queen, our mother, has reared me—and, believe me, since you are the one whom I most cherish, I will never have greatness or

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possessions in which you do not share. . . . But my strength lies in keeping in the Queen's good graces, and I am afraid that my absence will do me harm. . . . The wars will keep me constantly away . . . and my brother is always at her side, flattering her, and serving her in every way. I fear that in the long run I shall suffer ; for the King, who is of great courage, will not always find amusement in hunting, but, as he grows older, will want to chase men instead of beasts. Then he will deprive me of my Lieutenantcy . . . and go to lead the army himself." The Princess listened in silence and Anjou continued to urge his fears. Then, taking her hand, he abruptly came to his point. "It is absolutely necessary," he said, "that I should have some one most faithful to uphold my cause with the Queen. I know nobody so well-equipped for this office as you, who are my second self. You have all that is most needed, mind, judgment, fidelity—provided you will deeply oblige me and will entirely subject yourself, for you must force your inclinations. You must never fail to be at her *lever*, in her study, at her *coucher* ; in a word, all day and every day. That will impel her to confide in you. And I will meanwhile talk to her about your ability and the help and comfort it would be to her. I will entreat her to live with you no longer as with a child, but, in my absence, to use you as if you were myself. Lose your timidity with her ; speak to her with assurance, as though to me ; and, believe me, she will be very pleasant to you. To be beloved by her will be your joy and honour. You will do great things for me—and for yourself—and to you, after God, I shall owe the sustenance of my high fortunes."

It is hard to believe that this was not also one of Anjou's carefully prepared harangues. He was as cold and as artificial as steel, and was, perhaps, the more attractive for that ; while Margot was warm, spontaneous, impressionable. Her handsome pale-faced brother, the glamour of victory still about him, could at that moment mould her like wax. He lost no time in utilizing his power, and, needing a subtle intriguer, at once his slave and his agent, he revealed her to herself.

"His language," Margot says, "was quite new to me, for till then I had lived without a plan, only dreaming of dancing and of hunting. I did not even care a jot for my dress, or for my looks, for I was not of an age for such ambitions. Moreover, I had been bred up in the fear of my mother. But the

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instant my brother thus spoke, it seemed to me that I was transformed—that I had grown to be something better than I had ever been before. ‘You were right to be sure of me,’ I answered, ‘there is no one in the world who loves and honours you as I do.’”

The note of nature, one hardly known in Margot’s day, rings in her girlish phrases. At a moment when women lived by etiquette, she possessed the impulsive artistic temperament ; and the over-naturalness which afterwards ruined her was, in youth, her charm and her privilege. She had not long to wait for her new honours, for Catherine soon sent her a summons to come to her in her private room. “Your brother has told me of your conversation,” she said, “to him you are no longer a child ; nor shall you be one to me. It will please me to talk to you as if you were himself. Only be subject to me. But do not be afraid to speak openly, for it is my wish that you should do so.” “These words,” continued Margot, “made my soul feel what it had never felt—an unmeasured contentment. . . so that now I looked upon the sports of my childhood—dancing, hunting, the friendship of my fellows—with the eye of disdain and as long past. . . . I obeyed her commands, never failing to be the first at her *lever* and the last at her *coucher*. And she did me honour, even talking sometimes to me for the space of three or four hours.”

In no Valois household did matters go on smoothly for long. Mother and brother had agreed in conferring upon Margot the dignities of womanhood, and Margot was not slow to take to herself other feminine rights outside their bargain. About this time she was thrown a good deal with the young Duc de Guise, the most fascinating personage then at Court and as polished and effective as herself. Tall, of commanding presence, his eye piercing, his hair golden and curly, his beard thin and pointed, his grace that of the skilled athlete, he was made to impress Parisians, and Margot foremost among them. There may have been feeling on his side—he was evidently attracted by her ; but apart from any question of sentiment, the reasons of his courtship were obvious, and his uncle never ceased to urge him to win her and so to come nearer to the throne. Anjou, however, got wind of what was going on and determined to nip a plan so fatal to his interests and his prestige ; so likely to raise up a rival party which would first work hand and glove with the King, and, when the time was ripe, assert its power against himself. The moment was crucial, and his

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sister, appointed as his agent, was now more likely to become the instrument of the Guises.

He soon showed his resentment. When the war was over and he had once more rejoined the Court, his mother began praising the services and counsels of Marguerite. The girl was there, waiting for his commendation, but he only turned and looked at her coldly. He was glad of her success, he answered stiffly, but there was a time for all things, and what was useful one day might be harmful the next. When Catherine pressed him to explain, he beat no more about the bush, but burst out angrily about the Guises and denounced the young Duke's ambitions.

He was influenced, his sister tells us, by his new companion and favourite, de Guast, "the which possessed him till he saw but with his eyes and heard but with his ears, fascinating his mind with such tyrant maxims as "Love no man, but trust only to yourself." This may very likely be true, but there is no need to believe it. Margot was a brilliant liar, in a family of brilliant liars. And Catherine was as bitter as Anjou. "She showed me" (writes the Princess) "ever less and less of her favours, for she made an idol of her son and wished to please him in this and in all else." But the Queen-Mother had her own reasons, apart from her son's, for opposition. A marriage which would strengthen the Guise faction and once more upset the balance of her power would suit her billet no better than his; besides, she had long been negotiating a match for Margot with the Prince of Portugal.

At this opportune moment, Margot, then with her mother at St. Jean d'Angély, fell dangerously ill of an infectious fever, common in those days, called "*le pourpre*." Catherine, whom no one could accuse of cowardice, constantly visited her—it was part of her proper deportment as Queen-Mother, an art of which she knew the full value. But, what was more surprising was that Anjou was even more assiduous in attendance. The fact exasperated Margot. "His hypocrisy," she says, "made me worse; for after all his treachery and ingratitude, he would not budge day or night from my bedside, and he went on serving me as officiously as if we were in the heyday of our friendship." His motive was evident enough; under the cloak of devotion, he wished to play the spy and to allow her no talk he did not hear. For he had discovered his blunder. He had underestimated her powers, and, in trying to make an instrument for his own purposes, he had but sharpened an edged tool to cut them. Margot was then the only person he

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feared, because she was a cleverer intriguer than himself and, unlike his mother, was not blinded by admiration. On the one hand was the danger of her marrying Guise and forming an influential party; on the other, if she found her brother working against her, there was the equal peril of her enmity. No meanness, therefore, would he stick at to blind her to his hostile manoeuvres, and he made her imagine that he had changed his mind about the match at the very moment that he was undermining it. With this end in view, he courted the companionship of Henri de Guise, and presently brought him to see his sister. She was, as yet, hardly convalescent, and only just strong enough to be moved. "In this condition," she writes, "I travelled from St. Jean d'Angély to Angers, ill in body, but much more ill in soul. . . . Whereupon my brother, for the better weaving of his meshes, came every day to my chamber, bringing with him M. de Guise, whom he pretended to love dearly. And to make him believe it, he was wont to embrace him and exclaim, 'Would to God that you were my brother!' At the which M. de Guise made as if he did not hear."

It is clear from what followed that Guise and Marguerite had their own clandestine means of intercourse and that the stiff alleys of palace gardens concealed a good deal that was not stiff. But the Princess was all injured innocence when the crisis in their affairs arose. The long broached marriage with the Prince of Portugal now came to the front. "The Queen, my mother," she wrote in after days, "commanded me to attire myself richly to receive him, the which I did. But my brother having made her believe that I would have none of this marriage, she spoke to me that same evening and asked me my will, thinking that in this fashion she would find a pretext for anger. I answered that I had never had a will of my own—only one that depended upon hers; that anything which pleased her would please me also. She said with great choler (in the which I heard the prompting of others) that I spoke what was not in my heart, and that she knew perfectly well that the Cardinal of Lorraine had persuaded me to choose his nephew. . . . I was not allowed a moment's peace . . . and the presence of M. de Guise at Court for ever gave them a pretext for persecuting me."

It is, as usual, Alava who sent Philip an account of what followed. Was it on the same night as this interview that the climax came? and when the Princess met her lover,

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was she still in the gold tissue and jewels which she had put on in honour of her suitor? We cannot now tell the precise moment when she planned the midnight rendezvous with Guise which was destined to be her last. It took place in the palace of the Louvre—in some far-off apartment, most likely, where she thought that they would not be discovered. But the passionate prince lost all control and grew imprudently loud in his love-making. There was a vehement passage between the two which led to their being discovered. In the King's rooms all was in commotion, for he had been awakened by the news. It was five o'clock in the morning and the palace was as yet asleep. Charles pursued his usual course when in excitement and ran straight to his mother, followed by the Comte de Retz. Catherine, acting promptly, sent for Margot, who dared not disobey, but came straightway to the Queen's room with her *Gouvernante*, the Comtesse de Retz, to protect her. There followed one of those scenes—those episodes of brutal savagery set in a marble etiquette—which every now and then flash upon us the impossibility of reconstructing history as it was. Both the Retzes dismissed from the apartment, Catherine and the King, still in his nightdress, without a word fell on Margot and violently beat her. The girl was defenceless in their hands and stood before them stunned and dishevelled. Then followed the etiquette. It was by now broad daylight—the Court would soon be stirring—Margot might be seen in this condition. Catherine made the doors safe and set about repairing with her own hands what those hands had wrought. For an hour she rearranged Margot's hair, restored her dress; and, when the Queen-Mother's *lever* took place, the atmosphere had all its wonted calm. *Je porte la lumière et la sérénité*—these words, surmounted by a rainbow, formed the device of Catherine. Only she did not define the kind of storm which preceded the rainbow.

With Charles, there was no question of calm. Shaken with nervous rage, he paced the room. "We will kill him, we will kill him!" he muttered. But he thought better of it. A few days afterwards, with surprising despatch, a grand wedding was celebrated in Paris, and Henri de Guise was married to the younger Princesse de Clèves. There was no more talk of him and Marguerite. But the Portuguese match fared none the better. Hitches arose in the transaction, negotiations went no further, and the Princess remained as she was.

Her affairs were, for the moment, in abeyance. Catherine

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was absorbed in matrimonial business that was more important to her : the marriage of Henri d'Anjou. The King was off her mind, for in November, 1570, he had married Elizabeth of Austria, the daughter of the Emperor. The farce with Elizabeth of England which had once been enacted on his behalf now began again with his brother, one of the most amusing farces that has ever been given to the world.

For Elizabeth is, perhaps, the greatest actress of high comedy that has figured on the stage of history. She knew how to pose for the State-box ; she knew also how to play to the gallery. With a genius for turning her own foibles to advantage, she often made her vacillation the pivot of her scenic effects ; and though she sometimes laughed in her queenly sleeve, she oftener, perhaps, deceived herself and was the victim of her own stage illusion. It is a fact, even more striking, that she succeeded in taking in Catherine—her “ dear Sister of France ” ; for that the Queen-Mother was duped can hardly be denied by any reader of the long and solemn burlesque that followed. And it must not be supposed that in the interval between Catherine's offer to England of Charles IX, and her present proposals for Anjou, the curtain had gone down. Although it was generally known that the negotiations for Charles were at an end, Catherine never failed to resume them whenever French interests seemed in jeopardy ; and when the Archduke of Austria came forward as Elizabeth's suitor, and an English alliance with Austria, which meant one with Spain, became imminent, Catherine began all her old wiles. But none knew better than she and Elizabeth that neither of them were in earnest and that they were only “ gagging ” to fill up time. Catherine was, meanwhile, on her own part, making secret advances to Austria, and when she had once secured the Emperor's daughter for Charles, she let the English game drop till the King's wedding left the coast clear. It was then time to try a change of actors.

Elizabeth's part in the matter has taken three centuries to unravel. “ Often more than a man—sometimes less than a woman,” was Cecil's summary of his mistress ; she was also more than a woman. For the skill with which she hid her motives was super-feminine, and it is only now, through much research, that her main line of action has grown evident. If her flight, like that of many birds, was zigzag, she was all the while flying towards her goal. She had practically determined not to marry, but to enjoy all the varied

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sport of courtship : to indulge in the luxuries of gallantry without running any of its risks. She had been playing off the Archduke Charles against her other suitor, Eric of Sweden, and was quite ready for a third hero. As a politician, she, like the rest of Europe, depended upon the movements of Spain. While, as now, she was on bad terms with Philip, while Mary Stuart was alive and Catholic plots were rife in her kingdom, she sorely needed friendship with France. And as long as her safety demanded, she intended to keep up the scheme of the French marriage. With her Ministers it was otherwise. Cecil, Walsingham and Leicester, at any rate, were sincere in their promotion of the match. They saw Catholic storms ahead and danger from Spain loomed large ; there could be no real peace, they thought, until Elizabeth was safely married, and the best chance of securing it seemed to them to lie in union with Anjou. The manœuvrings of Elizabeth, the counter-manœuvrings of France, would fill several thick volumes. The whole long history is beyond our present scope, and much of it belongs more to England than to France ; indeed, when the scene shifts to London the affair figures but as an incidental passage in the chronicle of Catherine's diplomacy.

To the Cardinal de Châtillon, then still alive, there fell, as residential envoy, a large share of the transaction. But the most important people were the special ambassadors who plied between the two countries. There are three who figure largely : La Mothe-Fénélon, the Italian Cavalcanti, and, at the end, the well-tried La Foix. La Mothe-Fénélon was the first, and it was Leicester himself who introduced him to the Queen. For Leicester, having himself renounced all claim to her, was bent upon preventing any union which would further the interests of Spain, and took Anjou's suit under his wing.

La Mothe found the Queen "all wreathed in smiles and more richly decked than usual." She opened conversation by expressing her regret that she had not married early in life, and the Frenchman at once consoled her by suggesting a bridegroom. Anjou, he assured her, was "the most accomplished man there was to marry." Elizabeth's pleasure was not feigned—the thought of Anjou really excited her. She loved military prestige, and the victories of Jarnac and Moncontour had made a great impression on her ; while the reports that she heard about his person, his grace, the beauty of his hands (which was the talk of ambassadors), attracted her still more. But she deprecated her deserts. "The Duke

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made for higher game," she simpered : she was " very old," and excepting for her wish to leave an heir, she should blush even to mention a husband ; for " already she counted among those who are desired for their kingdoms, not for their persons."

There was nothing crude about the methods of the Maiden-Queen ; she knew how to keep the glamour of modesty and yet to get such rumours spread abroad as she wanted. She made confidences to her ladies with the wished-for result that, in a few days, London rang with the report of the French marriage. At a second interview with La Mothe, he pressed his master's suit with fresh zeal, and urged the domestic happiness of Charles IX and his young wife as a new incentive to the choice of a French husband. Elizabeth had a sense of humour. " I confess," she said, " that the thought of Madame d'Etampes and of Madame de Valentinois makes me feel a trifle anxious—I wish to be loved as well as honoured." Prince Henri was " both loving and loveable," La Mothe evasively replied, and the audience was adjourned until after the Queen should have consulted her Ministers. At the Council, a member, of more candour than tact, rose to say that her age was hardly suitable. " What mean you by that, sir ? " she cried angrily— " Am I not still of an age to please ? " Her answer showed that La Mothe's diplomacy had been successful. But Leicester warned him that the nation would go against the match. When he himself had dreamed of marrying her, he said, the people had banded against him ; now they were strongly in his favour, because they wanted to run him against Anjou.

Other obstacles, more serious, now assumed formidable proportions. Anjou himself, overpersuaded from the first to make this offer, flatly refused to proceed. " The Queen of England's age and her ugliness. . . freeze M. d'Anjou," wrote Tavannes. And there was a more compelling reason. The Duke had fallen in love with Renée de Châteauneuf and wanted to live with her at his will. But this could not be stated officially, and Catherine found pretexts more correct. " He doth not wish to marry her," she wrote, " even if she be willing, for he hath too often heard ill reports about her honour and hath read many letters on the subject from every ambassador that hath been in England. He feareth that he would suffer dishonour and lose all the reputation he hath gained. I would give all the blood in my body to divest him of this opinion, but in this one affair I have no hold over him."

Elizabeth, unperturbed by these aspersions, sent Lord Buck-

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hurst to Paris. Her ostensible reason was to offer formal congratulations to Charles IX upon his marriage; in reality, she meant him to sound Catherine. Eager to see the Tuileries Gardens, he was walking in its sheltered alleys when the Queen-Mother unexpectedly confronted him. She was surprised—agreeably surprised—to see him. What a lucky coincidence that both of them should have chosen just that moment for a stroll!—and she amicably paced the path with him. In a few minutes they were close in conference. She dwelled on her affection for Elizabeth, who would not, she felt certain, “make game of Anjou as she had done of her other suitors.” Buckhurst gave her no direct answer, but he grew confidential. His mistress, he assured her, “was resolved to marry out of England and only a Prince of her own rank.” To this she responded that “it was not for girls to seek out men, and so she would say no more.” Her words gave Buckhurst his cue for a carefully prepared “effect,” and he pulled from his pocket Queen Elizabeth’s portrait and presented it gracefully to Catherine.

Not long after, she returned the compliment and sent Elizabeth two pictures by Clouet, one to show her Henri’s face, the other to charm her with his figure. The Queen was delighted. She sent in haste for La Mothe-Fénélon to come and visit her. One of the portraits was in her hand. “This is only a chalk drawing,” she remarked, “and rather smudged with charcoal. But there is about the whole countenance a great air of true dignity and of a serious maturity the which pleases me infinitely; for in sooth I do not desire to be led to Church by a child.” The ambassador knew his business: “Age has no hold upon you, Madam,” was his prompt response. It was evident that the picture had made a deep impression, and one, apparently, justified by reality. “It is his misfortune,” wrote a friend of his, “that his portraits do not do him justice. Janet (Clouet) himself has not succeeded in depicting that certain something which nature has given him. His eyes, that gracious turn of the mouth when he speaks, that sweetness which wins all who approach him, cannot be reproduced by pen or pencil. His hand is so beautiful that if it were turned it could not be more perfectly modelled. Do not ask me whether he has inspired the passion of love! He has conquered wherever he has cast his eyes.” The description which was addressed to Walsingham was meant for the eyes of Elizabeth. The English envoy’s account has more of business and less of romance, but it does not really clash with the other. “The

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Duke is rather sallow," he writes, " his bodie very good shape, his legs long and thin, but reasonably well proportioned. And yet . . . I do not find him so well coloured as when I was last there." The Venetian ambassador is more vivid. " The Duke," he says, " is covered with perfumes and essences. He wears a double row of rings, and pendants at his ears, and spends vast sums on shirts and clothes." Here was another point in which he touched the fantastic sympathies of Elizabeth, whose wardrobe was a fable among Queens.

La Mothe-Fénélon had succeeded in coaxing her to write to Anjou a letter with her own hand. She had made many maidenly demurrings ; never had she done such a thing ; the pen would fall from her fingers, and so forth *ad infinitum*. But she wrote, and the letter was no coy one : " Monsieur," (it runs), " The idea which, as I hear, you have conceived of my poor charms, undeserving though they be, gives me hope that the law of our lives will be determined by the force of things more excellent than aught that I have yet felt in my breast."

There follow copious personal compliments and flowery innuendoes ; and she takes special pains to ask the Duke whether " any one had spoken to him about the beauty of her foot and arm." These were points of which she was particularly proud ; indeed, nothing vexed her so much as a report, spread in Paris shortly after, that one of her legs had been crippled. This, it was urged, would be a good reason for Anjou to marry "*cette vieille*," then to give her a " French potion," and marry the Queen of Scots—a rumour which duly reached Elizabeth's ears. It was not, however, this strange conception of matrimony so much as the slight to her person which she resented, and it made her so angry that, for a moment, she began to talk of a reconciliation with Spain. But, allayed by ambassadorial tropes, the storm blew over, and the Queen's self-love shone forth again undimmed. She was only " sorry," she told La Mothe-Fénélon, " that he had not seen her dance at the Marquis of Northampton's ball, which would have enabled him to assure the Duke that he ran no risk of marrying a cripple."

Her letter and her reported charms were in vain, and Anjou remained invulnerable. " The Queen," he knew, " was the rarest creature that was in Europe these five hundred years "—only he did not want her. And he found no lack of plausible reasons. Her "*mauvais moeurs*" were an obstacle, and the stories about her and Leicester shocked him—indeed, the French Court made free with him about them. " If he was

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to marry ' Millort Robert's ' mistress," said Tavannes, " had he not better return the compliment and marry Leicester to Mademoiselle de Châteauneuf ? " Besides, what was to become of his religion ? A sardonic contemporary suggested that his religion was Mademoiselle de Châteauneuf ; but it remained no less true that it suited the Duke to lead the van of extreme orthodoxy. Meanwhile he played at drafting the conditions for his marriage, but one glance showed them to be impossible, nor can he have believed that he would get what he proposed—a Catholic wedding, the free exercise of his faith, the title of King, half the throne of his wife, and a very large pension into the bargain.

But the more he drew back, the more anxious became Elizabeth. In talk she so far played the bride, that she began to have feminine agitations lest, on the wedding day, the marriage ring should fall to the ground, an evil omen which she dreaded. Her Ministers were as anxious as she was to urge on the match. The troubles in the State were daily becoming more pressing, and the discovery of the Ridolfi plot—that far-reaching Catholic conspiracy—had struck fresh terror into Queen and Court. The Pope, too, had joined Spain against her, while the Guises, as Mary Stuart's uncles, constituted a separate danger. They were also threatening Catherine's authority, and considerably sharpening her desire for a speedy consummation of the business and the safety of a close bond with England. The more dismayed did she feel at finding how small her power was with Anjou. He was surrounded by the agents of the Nuncio, fanatical Guisards, Spanish agents. One of them, Lignerolles, a Spaniard and a spy of the Guises—" the author of her son's whims," Catherine called him—acquired great power over the Duke. He became every day more *dévo*t, and, as far as his faith went, more stringent in his demands from England. " If he did not hear Mass often," said Catherine to Elizabeth's envoy, " he would look upon himself as damned." " He has grown so devout," she added, " that he hears it two and three times a day. And he observes all the fasts so scrupulously that his face has grown pale from the strain. I would far rather see him a Huguenot than watch him thus endanger his health." To gain her ends she applied her usual theory, that if you killed a man you killed the danger that sprang from his opinions. Lignerolles was suddenly murdered in broad daylight by a courtier called Villequier. He had, it was rumoured, spoken against

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Catherine to the King, who had repeated what was said to his mother. But all the world knew that this was a mere blind, and no one was surprised that the assassin was instantly pardoned.

Charles now tried his hand with his brother, but his grudge against him showed in all he said. "You should have been more open with me," he began, "and not have put me in this hole. Here am I, obliged to deceive the Queen of England, a lady whom I honour and esteem. You are for ever talking about your conscience; there is another matter about which you do not talk, and that is the big sum the clergy have paid you on condition that you stay here to champion the Catholic cause. But I give you fair warning—I acknowledge no champion but myself." Anjou, dumb from anger, tears of temper in his eyes, left the room and shut himself up in his own apartments, where he sulked for the rest of the day. Catherine, who was present, was beside herself. She knew that an account of the scene would be sure to reach England and give dire offence at headquarters. "Since the death of Henri II," reported Burleigh, "the Queen-Mother has not cried so bitterly." As for the King, he could no longer bear to have his brother near him, and Anjou lived in fear of his life.

The negotiations with England appeared to have reached a deadlock, and there seemed no means of moving the Duke. The Pope's agents were meanwhile working secretly for his marriage with Mary Stuart, and Catherine herself was considering another match for him and scheming with Cosimo de' Medici about a princess in Poland. But she had not abandoned her hopes from England, and she held constant interviews with the ambassadors—in galleries, in gardens, in her audience-chamber. A crucial talk took place, in the presence of Killigrew, between her and a fresh envoy, Smith. A Court ball was going on, and royalty was absorbed in dancing, when Catherine withdrew from the ball-room with the Englishmen to her own apartments. An argument began, as usual upon the question of religion. Low Mass would never satisfy her son, she told them—he must always have High Mass with "priests and censers and the rest." "The Queen will never grant such conditions," said Smith—"Here you are demanding High Mass with all the ceremonies of Rome—bells, candlesticks, the four Orders—the thousand⁷ devils." "But, surely, your Mistress could make Parliament consent?" asked Catherine. "Impossible,"

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was Smith's answer. The Catholics, he added, were dangerous and, in England, power could not be allowed them. The gravity of the conversation was, however, impaired by Killigrew's French when he alluded to Elizabeth of Spain as "*Votre fille perdré,*" instead of *perdue*, a mistake which made Catherine laugh till the tears came into her eyes. Perhaps she hoped she might change Smith's iron mood, but he was not to be laughed out of his views. The many colloquies ended in rupture and, after more months of wordy talk, negotiations were definitely broken off.

But in Catherine's vocabulary there was no such word as "impossible." When the old love went out at the window she forced a new one in at the door, and she lost no time in substituting her third son for her second. The promptitude with which she did it was amazing, and almost before Smith had ceased to think of Anjou she was opening her batteries for Alençon. "Why should Elizabeth not take the younger Prince?" she asked—"His beard is beginning to grow. I told him I was vexed that this should be so as he is still not so tall as his brother." Was Smith ironical when, by way of comfort, he reminded her that Pepin-le-Bref had been so short that he had not reached up to the waist of his Queen Berthe? If so, he did not take her by surprise. "You are right," she replied, "nothing matters but a man's heart and his courage," and thereupon she dismissed him. "He is past sixteen," she wrote to La Mothe-Fénélon, "and very small for his age. If he had the figure of his brothers I should have hopes of him, for he has a mind and a countenance beyond his years." "I think the Queen will take offence at the notion," said the French Ambassador; but there he was wrong, and the fact that Elizabeth was nearly thirty-nine and her new suitor not yet seventeen, seemed rather to please her than otherwise. She was very inquisitive about his height, and accounts of his appearance were sent home to her. "Alençon," wrote Killigrew, "is not so tall or fair as his brother" (a mild way of saying that he was swarthy and pitted with smallpox), "but that is as is fantasied. Then he is not so obstinate, papistical, and restive like a mule, as his brother is." The picture is not too attractive, but apparently it satisfied Elizabeth. But she still simulated offence at Anjou's behaviour, and it would, said the envoys, be needful for Alençon to go in person to England to mollify her. To this Catherine made no objection.

In the meantime, she gave a few business festivities—a

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Masque and a great State Tournament—at which she took good care to sit next to Killigrew and to point out her son's grace and spirit on every occasion. Then, having done all she could, she awaited the turn of the tide. But before the affair had gone far, more critical events claimed her energies, and the drama enacted at home drew her thoughts for the time away from England.

CHAPTER V

Charles IX

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THROUGHOUT the transaction with Elizabeth, Coligny had stood firm in his disapproval of the match. It would, he thought, cause civil war in England and give the group of Catholics round Mary Stuart fresh opportunities for daring. If he had had his will, he would have married Elizabeth to young Henri de Navarre, and so changed the course of history. On the face of it, however, he should have rejoiced in Catherine's scheme. Its pursuance had helped Huguenot interests; and while she and the King were negotiating matters, they had veered towards the Protestant side—a double-barrelled move, which ingratiated them with Elizabeth and counteracted the influence of the Guises. There were also fresh scores to be paid off on Philip's account. Before the English marriage was broached, Anjou had tried for the hand of the Infanta and had been ignominiously refused, while, to add injury to insult, Philip had carried off as his third bride the Emperor's eldest daughter, and Charles had to put up with the younger. Grudges such as these counted in estranging the French King, and, early in 1570, to the general surprise, he received a Protestant deputation, headed by the valiant La Noue and by Coligny's son-in-law, Téligny. They dazzled him with new schemes of power. If he would but stretch forth his hand, so they told him, the Netherlands would be his, glad to hail as their sovereign the man who freed them from the tyranny of Spain. More than this, the Spanish Indies seemed also within his reach, for Philip was at this moment busy fighting the Turks; and, needing his resources against them, he was forced to leave his Western islands defenceless. The vision of this fabulous Empire over magic golden lands, over solid Flemish subjects, fascinated the King and inclined him to lend help to the Low Countries.

Upon this, Louis of Nassau, in disguise, like a hero of romance,

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travelled from La Rochelle, where he had been with the Admiral, and came to make proposals to the King. He was the mouthpiece and the right hand of his brother, William of Orange, and his mission demanded the utmost privacy. It was to lay open before Charles the programme of the Protestant Netherlanders: no less a matter than the partition of their country between England, Germany and France. The chief interview took place at Fontainebleau, whither Prince Louis was smuggled; and, hidden in the porter's lodge, he stayed there through the three days' conference. He dwelt 'on the cruelties of Alva, the misery of Flanders. "My brother of Orange," he said solemnly, "has been raised up by God to deliver us from the burden of this yoke. We throw ourselves at the feet of your Majesty—we entreat you to take us under your protection. The cities will open their gates. Your share, Sire, shall be Flanders and Artois." When Louis left the royal presence the King was more than half won over, nor could Catherine at this juncture of affairs see any better means to keep her power. And Walsingham, who also spoke with Louis, had his own State reasons for furthering the plan. "Let us profit by our neighbours' disasters," he wrote to Leicester; "pray urge the demands of Count Louis upon the Queen, so that this little fire, only just lighted, may become a great conflagration by which we may gain great advantages."

In spite of all precaution, Alava got wind of these doings, and made haste to let Philip know that France was once more turning Huguenot. In an audience he had of the French King, he informed His Majesty that if things went on in this fashion, he might certainly look for war with Spain. It became clear that Charles must come to a decision and commit himself one way or another, but his course was far from easy. For if he signed the pact with the Netherlands and thus broke openly with Philip, he would need a great military commander, and the only man for the post was Coligny. But Coligny was far off at La Rochelle, a place of safety he had hitherto refused to quit; in spite of the peace, he had remained unreconciled to the King and Catherine, and he knew that the Court meant mortal danger. Their need of him now was sore; they were even ready for concessions. "I will not pledge myself to anything in Flanders without first taking counsel of Coligny. I will travel half-way to meet him; I will go as far as Blois to see him"—these were Charles' last



MARIE TOUCHET.
BIBLIOTHEQUE NATIONALE.
JEAN DE COURT, 1579.
From a photograph by A. Granjon

CHARLES IX

words to Nassau, and they were words big with destiny. If they sounded the recall of the Admiral to power, they also sounded his death-knell; they were the first note of the tocsin that rang in the St. Bartholomew.

In the events that follow, a figure, hitherto perceived dimly, begins to stand out clearly—the pathetic figure of the King, who now, at twenty-two years of age, creeps forth, as it were, with timid caution, from out the dire shadow of his mother. And before we watch the part he played for the next two years upon the stage, it is necessary, in some measure, to gauge the qualities that made him play it.

"Puny in appearance, with eager eyes and sympathetic countenance," such was a contemporary's description of the boy-King, which still held good when he was a man. It is borne out by the Huguenot, Hubert Languet. "True he is feeble of body," he says, "*mais il-y-a en lui une grande honnêteté*"—untranslatable words which ring the truer because they come from an opponent. There is something that fascinates, something also that repels, about the wayward and melancholy prince, predestined by his blood to be accursed, yet ever longing to be blessed. Many details are preserved of his appearance. "He was tall, but rather stooping in his gait." His nose was aquiline, his hair very scanty, his neck slightly crooked, his face prematurely wrinkled—the face of one who had never had a week's good health together. His eyes, set very far apart, were "golden brown"—not without a gleam of malice; "beautiful eyes—his father's eyes," says Correro, the Venetian envoy. The aspiration in them was belied by the weak mouth below—his countenance seemed to show the contradiction in his nature.

Charles IX was the only member of the Valois family in whom there was a lovable element; but there was about his personality the fatal flaw of insanity, and this we must bear in mind, or our judgment of him grows bewildered. The least perverted, the most decent of his brethren, there was in him less of his mother and more of his father than in the rest. The glamour of pathos clings round him, even round his irregularities—and his illicit love for Marie Touchet, the provincial Judge's daughter, lasted out his miserable lifetime. She it was for whom he called on his deathbed—who was his haven of refuge amid the storms both within and without him—nor can we find the heart to grudge this comfort to a nature that was starving for affection. "Nothing,"

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he was wont to say, "shapes the spirit of a young man so truly as a love which is rightly placed." It has been said that Marie Touchet was a Huguenot, and, if so, she may have affected the King's beliefs and encouraged his friendship for Coligny. At all events, she had real power over him. Rumour speaks of another lady, of whom he never dared tell his mother, but to whom he sent a message as he lay dying, but she played no real part in his existence. Perhaps she cared for him after he had tired of her. "I am not afraid of the German," she is reported to have said, when she first saw the portrait of Elizabeth of Austria. Had she heard of her more formidable rival? However this may have been we do not know, but Charles remained faithful to Marie. He was courteous and kind to the wife whom he had not chosen for himself. He too saw her picture and smiled. "She will not give me a single headache," was his verdict. He liked her, "*pour la voir naïve*," but he needed something stronger to hold him, and having found it, he was satisfied.

Sensitive, high-strung, extravagant, impressionable to a dangerous degree, the King had the artist's temperament. When he went to hear a preacher, as he was very fond of doing, his feelings were at once visible. "Over and over again," writes a Court chronicler, "have I seen him taken with such ardour that every one could know by his gestures, by the working of his features, what effect the sermon had upon him; and if they watched him, they could follow each emotion, each exaggeration of the preacher." Mimetic as he was, Charles always liked anything dramatic, though unfortunately, as he grew older, he rather made for decadent plays and grotesque comedies. He himself possessed the gift that is duller in the description and most winning when practised. Historians, ambassadors, comrades, are unanimous in describing his gift for oratory from his boyhood upwards; and even allowing for sycophancy in the eulogies of wary old diplomats, enough of their utterance is spontaneous to make us feel the young King's easy eloquence. The arts were his real, his chosen playground. "*Dieu qu'il aimait la musique!*" wrote one who knew him well—"Little it mattered to him whether it were for instruments or for voices." From childhood, music had been his hobby; he had chosen his own "*Chantres*," the choir of his private chapel, and had worked with them at part-singing. At this moment, he had an enthusiasm for Orlando di Lasso, the Duke of Bavaria's

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musician, then staying at the French Court, in whose society he spent enchanted hours, "for that Orlando's music ravished him so completely that he hardly had ear for any other." And he had a pet singer too, a much cosseted Abbé, Etienne le Roy, "the which he loved uniquely, appointing him Judge at the Court of what should be deemed good in music."

The King was many-sided, and, in other arts he took a more creative part. His book on his favourite pastime of stag-hunting—" *De la Vénérerie* "—is a tapestry of coloured words, rich and simple, interwoven by no cold or unskilled hand ; and his love of poetry and poets, his adoring friendship for Ronsard, would almost have proved his poetic sensibility, had not the verses that he wrote in his honour left a more tangible testimony.

Tous deux également nous portons des couronnes,
Mais, roi, je la reçus ; poète tu la donnes,
Ta lyre, qui ravit par de si doux accords,
Te soumet les esprits, dont je n'ai que les corps ;
Elle amollit les coeurs, et soumet la beauté.
Je puis donner la mort, toi l'immortalité.

—these are lines that might well have crowned a singer who was not already a king, and they show the best gift of Charles de Valois. His father had been a poet before him and he had not his father's eyes for nothing. Often he would pass the night spouting Ronsard's works, or having them read out to him by his singing Abbé, or by Amadis Jamyn, Ronsard's follower ; and the small hours would find him listening, rapt—time and place forgotten, the candles burning low in their sockets. Unfortunately the artist in him was marred by the warp in the woof. His very activity was diseased, his restlessness knew no bounds ; he hardly slept, and midnight was his usual hour for rising. Nor had he only the usual foibles of the æsthete—fastidious disgusts, capricious fears, fantastic and intermittent enthusiasms. He was subject to fits of wild folly, of reckless perversity, of insane energy about trifles. Wherever we turn, we see the traces of his ghastly heritage—we find the madman, and the decadent madman. Now he would spend long days silent, in immovable moods of black melancholy, the humour most general with him ; now he would rise at dead of night, and, awakening his followers, force them to rush out with him, masked, with lighted torches,

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through the dark streets of Paris, to thrash some unconscious lordling lying comfortably asleep in his bed. Sometimes he would shut himself up in his room and work off his gloom by turning blacksmith, beating iron, fashioning arms, until he was prostrate from exhaustion; or, more often, by getting on his horse and hunting with such extraordinary violence, not unfrequently all night as well as day, that fever overtook him and he killed the beasts that he pursued with blows from the stick he carried. In frenzied fits such as these his strength became fictitious and he hardly knew what he did—once almost strangling a man in horse-play. At times he would spend all his energy over some bodily feat, betting with a foolish courtier that in two years he would kiss his own foot, and devoting himself to winning his wager; or imitating the tricks of the tumblers and acrobats whom he courted.

Apart from these bouts, he was neither violent nor cruel, but gentle, docile and inclined to mercy. There were times when, with his narrow vision, he held severity to be the wisest policy. "It is cruel to be clement, it is clement to be cruel," was a saying that fell from his lips. But once, when some wanton barbarism against the Protestants was falsely laid to his door by Alva, his indignation knew no bounds. "No man," says Pascal, "is so different from another as one man is from himself," and this was the same Charles who, lashed into madness, could enjoy the sight of unspeakable horrors upon the Eve of St. Bartholomew. His dual nature was perhaps the more pitiful because he was conscious of it and because he struggled against his fits of fury. Contemporaries bear witness to his sober palate and sparing diet. He was a connoisseur of wine and fond of it too, says old Hâton, but finding that it heated his blood, he gave it up and took to sugar and water—not an over-festive compensation. This would be a puerile detail were it not for the old diarist's picture of His Majesty seated at the table of a comfortable Chanoine of Sens and sipping a glass of a "*bon cru*" "which he found wondrous good." Kings are not always so abstemious. Nor was he excessive about dress. "For in truth he was less sumptuous in his garments than those who were around him," says one who saw him, "and he had infinite displeasure when he saw the curious fashions of those court-monkeys, who painted their faces and dressed their hair and persons . . . now in the manner of Italy, now of Poland, now of Germany

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. . . for most of all did he hate cosmetics and the gew-gaws of languid whippersnappers."

His account-book bears out his moderation. The entries in it do not seem extravagant. "Ten livres for washing the pages' heads and sponging their hair" does not strike us as reckless expenditure: no more do the sums for "a Cremona violin"; for "divers singers and musicians"; "for a silver powder-box and spoon"—or even the amount that was required for bringing back "a Cyprian brother and five sisters" who had been kept as slaves by the Turks. Perhaps this should count among the royal charities—by no means the only one that Charles practised. Here, he pays "for an orphan-student's education"; and there, for "*un jeune enfant*" "whom His Majesty took from below and caused the same to be trained up with his other *petits chantres de musique*." There is more of kingly luxury in "a pair of incarnadine garters" and "a suit of silver tissue and orange, with silver tissue hose overlaid with white and orange, and with satin shot like a pigeon's breast." Most of all, in the thirty-nine gorgeous pairs of breeches for His Majesty's lackeys, and in the thirty-nine fashionable pads which gave them the requisite stiffness.

Yet even the thirty-nine lackeys do not proclaim Charles a spendthrift. If, however, he made restrictions in one quarter, this outlandish monarch permitted himself equivalent excesses in another. His intemperance of language was notable even in that day—his oaths and his perjuries were fantastic. "Yet that," says his easy-going critic, "was because he accounted swearing rather as an ornament of discourse than as a vice—for which reason he also broke his faith with all the ease in the world."

Nevertheless, strange to say, he remained a King. Ambassadors report that he was the best of listeners. He was dignified at will, he was sympathetic, he had the true royal tact. "To a poet he always spoke of poesy—to a soldier of arms, battles, strategies—to an architect of his art and its rules, which he had at the tip of his tongue—discoursing, indeed, of every craft, as if it had been always his profession. And he held it passing strange if any talked to him of matters apart from their business, for he thought that it must be hard for a man to judge truly of aught outside his calling."

He could boast the other kingly quality of acting up to the occasion. On the morning of his coronation, when he was barely fourteen years old, his mother asked him if he could

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bear the burden of the long day. "Madam," he answered, "it is a burden that I never could refuse, rather will it seem most sweet to me whensoever and howsoever a kingdom like this one presents itself to me." The power of endurance was strong in him, harshly trained as he was by his bodily sufferings; and his native melancholy early imbued him with a great indifference to life. At the siege of Metz, when he was but fifteen, he was eager to command the army, and when Catherine remonstrated, urging the danger to his person, "France," he said, "will never be kingless; my brother will succeed me in due season, nor is my own life of such value that it should be treasured up in a coffer as if it were a jewel in my crown." The zeal for war and for military glory possessed him with despotic force, as, indeed, [it possessed most princes; but, in him, it was sharpened by that jealousy of his brother which from the outset overshadowed him. After Anjou's victories at Jarnac and Montcontour, Dorat, the poet, wrote some complimentary verses to Charles. "Ha!" he cried, "write nothing henceforth for me. This" (and he struck the paper in his hand) "is merely a mass of lies and flatteries, for as yet I have done nought to be well spoken of. Pray keep your fine words—you and all the troop of *Messieurs les poètes*—for my brother, who gives you fresh subjects for your Muses every day of his life." The years increased his bitterness. "My mother," he said, "so loves him, that she steals for him the honour due to me. I only wish that we could take it in turn to reign—or at least that I might have his place for half the year!" Their rivalry pervaded the commonest details of their day. "The very way in which they listened," says Brantôme, "was notably different; Charles gave audience with head bent and eyes on the ground; Anjou with his head raised high, his face towards his hearer, his eye fixed full upon him." And in music, the Duke, who also had a voice, would choose songs and airs of a kind exactly the opposite to those which the King most cared for. Even their deportment showed a contrast. Charles used to say that "he himself was a true Frenchman, but his brother, who hardly spoke excepting with his head and eyes and shoulders, was a true Italian." And while Anjou had a courtier's manners and a charm which his world found most seductive, Charles, for all his talent for rhetoric, despised palace airs and graces, and affected a soldierly speech—an abrupt and commanding manner. The marriage with Elizabeth would have pleased

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him for this alone—that it would have taken Anjou out of France.

No doubt Charles, more impressionable than most men, had been largely affected by his education. His later tutor Retz (Gondi), and Birago, the Italians whom Catherine appointed, were the evil stars of his existence, and it was under their influence that his character took a turn for the worse. They taught him to falsify his word—to excite his nerves—to betray his best affections. But he had no real taste for evil. "If vicious men came by chance into his company and importuned him by reason of their presence, he sought" (says one who knew him) "every means by the which to distract himself from hearing what they said; now having French verse read aloud, and now the Annals of France, or again '*Giron le Courtois*'; or he would ask for singing, for playing of the lute, spinet or lyre, remaining the while all pensive, with his eyes turned up, like one that dreams." And earlier in life he had had better luck in his teachers. Amyot himself had been his "Governor"—Amyot the greatest Greek scholar of his day, a thinker by no means unheretical, a Humanist who believed in goodness. He tried to instil it into his ill-starred charge, studying the New Testament with him often. After the Church functions on feast-days, he would take the boy apart and, holding the Gospel in his hand, would give it to him to kiss; then, sitting down by his side, would read and interpret it to him. Charles called him "*mon Maître*," and was on the best of terms with him. Humour, as we conceive it, was certainly not of those times; perhaps it has been left us as compensation for the passion and adventure which preclude it. At any rate Brantôme's notion of choice royal wit does not quite coincide with ours. Charles twitted Amyot on his frugal fare—his never-changing dish of ox-tongue; for Amyot, a tradesman's son, had not forgotten the starvation of his first college-days, when, for the sake of learning Greek, he had lived on a dry crust in a garret. "Ox-tongues you must eat as beseems you," cried the King with loud mirth, "for you know your father was a butcher and you must enjoy what you once saw him prepare." The *mot*, as it was then considered, went the round of the Court; it was just the jest to please Catherine.

Charles, with all his complexities, was at heart a simple creature—full of bad jokes and warm affections. When left to his own devices, he was a good friend, a loyal protector.

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To be kind to an old nurse is perhaps a rather tedious distinction of great men ; but it meant more than usual in a Valois, and Charles remained faithfully kind to the old woman who had reared him. And Lasso, Ronsard, Dorat, later Coligny, were not the only men who felt the truth of his friendship.

To prove all things and to know all sorts of people was one of his theories of life. Every kind of sleight of hand and craftsman's skill attracted him, and he himself could coin all the pieces of his realm so deftly that none could tell false from real. One day he showed two *Ecus* to the Cardinal de Lorraine. "No one, you see, could find me out," he said triumphantly. "*Ah, Dieu!*" replied the Cardinal, "you, Sire, can do as you like, for you carry pardon inside you." The King's curiosity did not stop at respectable persons—it was a quality tinged with romance. He had heard some talk about *Les Enfants de la Malice*, a band of cut-purses famous in Paris for their feats, and he was bent upon learning their secrets. He must see them—they must teach him—they should have a safe conduct—his Captain, La Chambre, must get hold of them. The Captain, who knew his way about the town, and was probably not too reputable himself, accordingly procured ten of these thieves, who came "very well-dressed and gallant," and were brought into the King's rooms at the Louvre. That night there was to be a great Banquet, a State ball, which would give them ample opportunities. They were to mingle with the throng and ply their art—but not till they had given His Majesty a signal that they were about to begin ; and he pledged them his word, as their monarch, that what booty they might gain should be theirs. At the end of the evening they brought him three thousand crowns' worth of filchings—money and jewels and the short satin cloaks they had taken from unconscious dancers' shoulders. Charles meanwhile had "thought to burst with laughter at the sight of the hapless dandies going off in waistcoats like lackeys." The ball over, he kept his word and gave his rascals back their winnings, said he would hang them if they ever tried their tricks again, and bade them "Go serve him in the wars." It is a pity that François Villon was not of that motley company.

The King took care to divide his guests—he had his pick-pockets one day and his poets the next. He was used to send for *Messieurs les poètes* whenever the weather was bad. Then "summoning them into his *Cabinet*, he passed his time with

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them there," with Ronsard, Dorat, Baif, Jamyn—with the stars of the Pléiade and its satellites. They often brought new works that he had begged from them, and he paid them—but none too nobly. Here the Medici merchant came in. For, writes Brantôme, "his rewards came very gradually and not all at once, that the poets might ever be constrained to do well. 'They were,' quoth the King, 'like horses who must be fed, but not filled or fattened, since, once that happened, it was all over with them.'" On fine days, however, poets had no chance. At such times, to quote again, "he was out of the house which he hated strangely, and away to the country, and in action." "Buildings are the sepulchres of the living," he said. Unlike his grandfather, the great creator of Châteaux, Charles had no turn for building. He loved the open air and the forest, above all (even more than François I), he loved hunting. He was versed in mysteries of the art that were known to no other, and to him it did not mean sport, but a fierce war with the beasts. To see him plunging on his horse through the moonlit woods must have been a ghostly, hardly human, sight, and yet to watch him riding forth on a day when he was happy, rejoicing in the summer and rejoicing in the chase, might have furnished a subject for his poets. In this mood is it that his "*De la Vénérerie*" is written—the book of which it has been said that "stags are its heroes."

"Sith that I have undertaken to set forth in each detail the fashions and stratagems by the which, to take the stag," it opens, . . . "I will begin by that which, meseemeth, has been omitted by all such as have written heretofore on the matter; to wit, how to people a forest where as yet stags are not. For without them, there can be no love of hunting. . . . And in sooth, they partake of man's nature, for it is because of love that they fight with one another, whence cometh it that some of them are slain; and thereat are they so transported with grief that they allow men to come near them without any sign of fear. At evening they hold their sports in common, and to see it you would say it was a tournament."

The King's pages smelt of the greenwood, but his work remained unfinished and unknown, cut short as it was by death.

In the graver art of government, Charles had begun to take his share. He was, as we have seen, born autocratic. "Before he had a beard upon his chin, he had defied the Parlement.

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Once, when they had refused to pass a royal edict, 'It is for *vous autres*, to obey my decrees without a question,' he said threateningly, 'for I know better than you what is proper and fitting for the good and the welfare of my kingdom.' " For that kingdom, according to his lights, he really cared, nor was his position a sinecure. A "letter of Advice," addressed to him by Catherine, when he began to figure as a ruler, shows us her notions of a French sovereign's work. It also, more unconsciously, shows us herself and her shrewd insight into the race he had to govern.

He must, she said, have a fixed hour for rising, and that no late one. Directly he had put on his chemise, the expectant throng must be allowed to enter—"princes, lords, captains, knights of the Order, gentlemen and servants," for this had been his father's custom and it must be his. He must gossip with them, please them, and dismiss them. Then to business, attended by his four Secretaries. After his Council there were despatches till ten, when he must go to Mass, in State, and, service over, he might take a walk till dinner. He was never to dine later than eleven, and after the meal, twice a week at least, he should give audience. He might now permit himself a visit to her, or to the Queen, not, it must be clearly understood, for any reason of family affection, but because "it is a Court fashion which infinitely pleases the French and to which they have long been accustomed." Two hours must then be passed in public, to be followed by retirement to his study till three, after which he should ride or tilt or sport with the *Jeunesse dorée*, in order "to pleasure them." By that time he had reached the hour for supper, which he was to take with his family. Twice a week there must be a State Ball, and on other days sumptuous joustings; for, said she, "I have often heard your grandfather declare that a monarch must have two days for living at leisure with his Frenchmen; and if they are to love him truly, he must know how to keep their minds gay and their bodies occupied. In sooth, they have such need for activity that if one doth not duly entertain their energies, they put them to more dangerous uses." With these wily festivities the royal day was at an end.

Not so the Queen-Mother's letter. Countless directions for the management of the kingly household ensue; a secret domestic police was, unseen and unheard, to oversee and overhear; no insult, no bad word might be allowed; fear was to reign everywhere, and, while his Majesty slept, not a door

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in the palace might be opened. As to administration, the King must take great pains with provincial affairs ; he must question local governors in detail ; he must not be content with one talk, he must speak a word whenever he saw them. Again she enforces precedent. " Your father and your grandfather did this," she says ; " when they found nothing else to say to them, they asked them questions about their households." And Charles must be careful to reward them for their service ; it was his best chance of knowing what went on outside Paris. With regard to appointments and honours, he must always see to those himself ; must keep lists of candidates and places in his pocket, to study at odd moments ; must never leave anything to Secretaries. He should not give to those who asked, but, rather, seek out such as served him quietly. As far as he could, he ought to govern through personal motives, winning over three or four men in every town to keep him informed of the smallest event that happened. " In this way, but in this way alone," she concluded, " will you so rule that no city hath any will but yours . . . in one word, *you* will be their will for ever."

There is a postscript in her own handwriting. "*Monsieur, mon fils,*" it runs, " you will accept what I send, in all its frankness, because of the good goal it makes for—and you will not take it ill that I have dictated it to Montague, for thus you may read it the more easily. Your forebears have done the same before me."

It was characteristic of Catherine that she liked to act under the ægis of the past. There had been but little change in her in this, or in any other way, during the ten years that had passed since the King's coronation. Outwardly she had grown stouter, and that corpulence which so trammelled her later days was already a slight inconvenience. She walked a great deal to counteract it, so quickly that " none could keep pace with her "; she ate immensely and " of all things indifferently," which hardly improved her case. Bluff and affable by turns, loving a broad joke even when it turned against herself, homely of speech, with a trenchant tongue that dealt in racy idioms of the people ; a hater of gloom, with a taste for seeing all around her merry ; no deep student of men, or of events, but an indefatigable minister of expediency—Catherine's genius was to seem a good fellow, perhaps to feel one, and never to act in character. Her fine qualities were for the State. Her public spirit, her devoted energy,

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were undeniable. "Scarcely," says Corroero, "has she time to eat . . . or sleep, so great are her harassing cares. Nothing is done without her knowing it—not even the smallest thing. She runs here and there between the armies, doing a man's work without a thought of sparing herself." Yet all who fail to get what they want, "scream and scold," he adds, "and throw the blame upon the Queen-Mother . . . and she is beloved by no one in the land." Least of all, he might have ended, by the children for whom she toiled.

CHAPTER VI

Coligny and Queen Jeanne at Blois

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" which the followers of Navarre now wear as of their supreme Prince." ¹

Téligny, who buckled on his golden spurs, who had long been his staunch henchman, about this time also became his son-in-law, by marriage with his eldest daughter, Louise. Coligny's boys were growing up; his life was prosperous. But his country came before his home, his King before his wife; and the news of Nassau's interview with Charles, the prospect of alliance with Orange, of a war against Philip, of French rule in the Netherlands, of a new and ideal Empire for France, made him feel that his call had come. The scheme was originally his—it had been his dream; the war with Spain was what he had prayed for. To him it was the new crusade for faith and country against Antichrist. And this war was no empty vision, but a practicable reality which no reasonable statesman would reject. To its fulfilment his presence was essential, and nothing could hold him back. But, before taking any crucial step, he wrote to the Queen-Mother.

" Madame," runs his letter, " I know that you have conceived false opinions of me, and that, at the instance of my enemies, you have borne ill-will towards me. But I dare say that when your Majesty has stripped all my actions to the bone, from the time you first knew me to the present hour, you will confess that I am far other than the man they have tried to paint me, and when I remember all the kindness I have had from your Majesty, I most willingly forget the evil my foes have sought to do me with you, and I will only remember what is good. But this, Madame, is my conclusion—that I entreat you to believe that you have not a servant more affectionate than I am."

His letter met with speedy response. Royalty had, as we know, felt the need of him; Catherine, for one, saw that he alone could save the situation; that her safety at that moment lay in an alliance with the Protestants, which could not be had without the Admiral. The astrologers whom she consulted corroborated his schemes of conquest—evidence that greatly affected her—not to speak of the fact that Coligny had an army at his back, as requisite as his military genius. And Charles was dazzled by the notion of a new empire and of

¹ *Modo che si tenne nelle cerimonie delle nozze dell' Amiraglio nel 1571. Rome, Barberini library, as quoted in "Gaspard de Coligny," by Whitehead.*



ODET DE COLIGNY, DIT LE CARDINAL DE CHÂTILLON EN 1570.

BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE.

FRANÇOIS CLOUET.

From a photograph by A. Giraudon.



COLIGNY AND QUEEN JEANNE AT BLOIS

new wars in which he might at last eclipse his brother. Petitions had also flowed in from the Huguenots that their chief might be recalled, the granting of which, it was evident, would be a most conciliatory measure ; while the hour was singularly propitious, as the Guises had, for the moment, absented themselves from Court and Catherine had just succeeded in getting Coligny's arch-foe, Alava, recalled to Spain. She and Charles seized the occasion and both wrote to the Admiral, begging him to come to Blois and pledging their word for his safety.

Coligny and his escort rode into Blois, two and fifty gentlemen clanking up the steep hill to the Castle. When he dismounted in the court-yard, he heard that Catherine had fever and kept her room. He was taken to her there without delay, and once again they confronted one another—for the first time since the Peace. The Admiral had changed the most ; it seemed to be an old man who stood before her. The King was with his mother, and the Admiral made as if to throw himself at his sovereign's feet. But Charles prevented him, and, kissing him three times, "*Mon père,*" he said, " now that we have got you, we shall not let you go." To prophetic ears the words might seem of sinister import, but Charles spoke them in honest pleasure ; of old, he had dearly loved the Admiral. Catherine was the next to embrace him, and presently he was led to the Duc d'Anjou's apartments, where the Prince, who was also indisposed, feigned demonstrative joy at his visit. Coligny, always anxious to be trustful, easily relapsed into confidence and tried to cheer his friends about his safety. His accounts of " the good cheer " that was made for him are full of simple-minded enjoyment, but those who cared for him were not easy. A few days after his coming, the Duc de Montpensier met him one evening in a badly lighted passage of the palace. " Heavens, man ! " whispered the Duke, " how can you be so rash as to walk here alone ? Don't you know the folk with whom you are dealing ? " " Am I not in the King's house, on the strength of the King's word ? " asked Coligny. " But the King is not always master in his own house," was the Duke's answer. Montpensier was himself a good Catholic—he was also a man of honour, and foul play was foul play in his eyes, whether done to Protestant or Papist. His fears and those of others for Coligny may well have been emphasized by the death, this year, of Cardinal Odet, in London, from a short and sudden illness. His body was carried to Canterbury Cathedral, where men say his ghost still walks ;

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pomp and circumstance surrounded his end ; but for all that, his fate, and that of Andelot, were not reassuring for his brother. Coligny's behaviour was characteristic. It was not his way to make mysteries, and, ill-content with rumours and monitions, he lost no time in going to head-quarters. Strange though it may seem, he still thought he could get the truth from Catherine. Seeking her out, he went straight to his business. She looked him in the eyes. " I know full well," she said frankly, " that you can no more trust in us than we can trust in you. Have you not offended my son, the King, and taken arms against him ? Well, we will let that rest, and I assure you that if you will be his good servant and faithful subject, I will pile upon you favours of all sorts."

Perhaps she had never more grossly misread the man with whom she had to do than when she made this suggestion—the least tempting, the most hostile to his nature.

" We are both of us too old to try and take in one another," she said to him on another occasion ; " and you," she added good-humouredly, " are in your right to show mistrust ; but as for a poor Queen, whatever she says or does, no one admits it to be possible that she can have such fears at all." This " poor Queen " understood her part. " The foxes," wrote Margot, " are perfect in their foxing "—and they had a lion for their dupe.

The favours spoken of did not tarry. While the Guises sat in gloomy council upon him in their family Château, Coligny was feasted and petted, his bride pressed to come to Court, and his power with the King increased daily. His affairs prospered, and the alliance with the Netherlands was in progress. Anonymous letters of warning from time to time threw a shadow on the splendour ; " Remember with whom you have to do " was their burden ; " with the soul of the State who has no soul," says one among them. But he allowed himself to ignore them and to bask in a short blaze of prosperity. His influence upon the impressionable Charles grew to a surprising extent, rooted as it was in real affection. Coligny loved the young man as he had loved the boy, and believed that he could mould him to good purpose for the welfare of France. The King's impulsive nature, his kindness, his courage, his weakness, his loneliness, appealed to his strong protector. And so, most of all, did his ingenuousness ; for, in spite of his oaths and perjuries, " Charles " (it is a diplomat who says so) " could not tell a lie without showing it." He was now insepar-

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able from the Admiral—" my gossip " he called him—listening to him on all subjects and granting him requests that he refused to his brother Anjou. Henri II was not so subject to the Constable as Charles IX was to Coligny. The Catholics saw themselves flouted, and the courtiers, who had spurned their great opponent, now faced about and sued for his good graces. He made, at His Majesty's request, a kind of State Entry at his right hand into Paris. But coming to the Rue Saint-Denis, not far from the Fountain of the Innocents, he caught sight of a pyramid, erected upon the site of a house that had been burnt down as the home of a Huguenot, and he made a vigorous protest against its being there. There were demurs, yet, though the King knew that the measure would be dangerously unpopular, he obeyed the Admiral's will and the pyramid was carried away. This was too much for fanatical Paris, and a riot ensued which only yielded to the military. The whole affair served as a gauge of Coligny's authority, and also of the danger it involved. Anxious letters arrived from La Rochelle entreating him to "disintoxicate himself—to shake off the fumes of the Court," but his friends need not have been uneasy. If his head was turned for a moment, if he was blinded by illusion and trusted overmuch to appearances, his single-mindedness remained intact, nor did he relax his watchfulness. He knew well enough the risks that belonged to his elevation, whether from the jealous Queen-Mother, or from his more apparent foes, and he entreated his followers not to make too much of his new honours.

His talk with the King was mainly upon one topic, for he constantly kept before his eyes the idea that was inspiring his own mind—that of a united and regenerate France; of a kingdom to include the half of the Netherlands, a realm in which tolerance and justice should reign. He developed the first scheme still further; the French should not only take the Spanish Indies, they should penetrate into South America, perhaps even as far as Brazil and Florida, in both of which countries he himself, at his own cost, had already founded colonies of Huguenots.¹ Everything promised success; the King listened with enthusiasm; had he not already given proof of his good faith by summary execution of sundry Catholics who had massacred sundry Protestants at Rouen? And by giving permission for a Huguenot Synod, with Béza himself as its President,

¹ In Brazil, 1555. In Florida, 1562 and 1564.

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to sit in peace at La Rochelle? Small wonder that Coligny believed that the Protestants' day had come at last.

The King would hardly allow him to take the few days' holiday at Châtillon that he begged for. He gave him money to make improvements there—he would give him anything but leave of absence. "I know well how fond you are of gardening," he exclaimed in a burst of petulance—words in which the vigilant Huguenots found a strained and hostile meaning. The King, they said, was covertly alluding to the days (before his flight from Meaux) when his embassy of spies had found the Admiral pruning the vines of his garden. If their suspicions in this instance were misplaced, it was not surprising they should feel them. Soon after, when Coligny got the desired leave, the evil rumours increased. It was public talk that the Guises, who had now moved to Troyes, were plotting to come to Châtillon and kill him. "If" (he wrote to Charles) "it had not been for my promise to your Majesty, I should have liked to meet them half way." But they, finding themselves detected, retired to hatch new schemes against him. One plan of their devising came very near success. A sham fort was to be built at Saint-Cloud, upon the Île du Palais. Anjou was to defend it. Coligny and a regiment of Protestants were invited to make a mock-attack. At a given moment, Anjou was to stop play, to fire in deadly earnest, to kill the foe and all his followers. Palace-walls have ears and the conspiracy was noised abroad. The King put an end to the affair by ordering the fort to be demolished. His fidelity to the Admiral continued to be demonstrative, and it formed the burden of Coligny's letters when he wrote to reassure his comrades. Charles' friendship, indeed, grew inconvenient, and throughout the early winter he was constantly sending for his absent "*Compère*," and asking his counsel at Court.

Coligny's defect was in his vision. Had he not been so short-sighted, he would have perceived a speck on the horizon. Catherine, he might have known, allowed no influence near the King but hers, nor would she ever have summoned the Admiral had she not felt secure of her supremacy. "The Queen-Mother," commented Tavannes, "knowing how entirely she possessed her son, her son's moods, her son's tutors, did not care a jot for his opinions, certain as she was that she could change them in an instant." Once again, her ignorance of moral force had blinded her, and the possibility of a supplanter had not yet entered her thoughts. As yet, however, she kept passive, for she still had need of the Admiral.

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She did not only require him as the leader of a possible war against Spain. She had another reason for his presence—her projects for the marriage of her daughter. The moment had come when the long-discussed alliance with Henri de Navarre should take place. She had played at cat and mouse long enough, and she now saw which side the scale would dip, and could determine whether support from Catholic or Protestant would best ensure her own security. Having decided for the Protestants, the match with Navarre became all-important, but, to effect it, she knew, would now be no easy matter. Queen Jeanne had grown increasingly distrustful and would not be disarmed by royal blandishments. Coligny was the one man to whose persuasions she would listen ; the only intermediary who could successfully conduct negotiations. With Coligny, therefore, it would be impossible for Catherine to quarrel till the marriage was an accomplished fact.

Coligny had at first disliked the idea of Henri's marriage with a Catholic, but he soon came to see the advantages that such an alliance meant for his party. There remained only one person who did not approve of the plan, and that was the Princess Marguerite. Her love for Henri de Guise—the only real feeling of her life—was not rooted out of the girl's heart, and she was not one to hide her inclinations. There was the usual scene. She lay bathed in tears, stretched comfortless upon an oaken coffer ; her *Gouvernante* was sent to reason with her ; coaxing alternated with scolding ; but Margot found that she was beating against adamant, and she soon left off all show of resistance. Overtures were made to Queen Jeanne—entreaties sent to her to come to Court, to bring King Henri with her, but she, half sceptical, half willing, for some while gave no definite answer.

There is nothing more surprising in these months than the vitality of Catherine's brain. What it lacked in depth, it gained in quickness ; it turned with a juggler's agility from one intricate intrigue to another. While laying traps for Coligny and outwardly keeping well with Spain, she was busy over really keeping well with England, and still carried on negotiations for the marriage of Alençon with Elizabeth. The Prince, then seventeen years old, was so recalcitrant that she kept him a prisoner at Amboise, where she had him under her eye. "The place is strong and massive, and the little frog cannot possibly get away from it," she wrote to the Guises. In later days, "my little frog," was Elizabeth's name for her French suitor. Did she borrow it from his mother ? However that

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may be, Catherine had him safe in her hand and pursued her cool game with the Ambassadors.

But these dealings with England meant mere dalliance, and the real matrimonial game was with Navarre. The match between the Princess Marguerite and Henri now occupied public attention. Its importance for the French was incalculable, not only as a Protestant alliance, but as giving them the Kingdom of Navarre, the territory between France and Spain—a sure defence against Philip. Jeanne, as we know, was holding out; the difference in religion was in the way. And Catherine saw clearly that she could not have Henri but through Jeanne, who kept a tight hold over her son. But Catherine was determined to get the better of her; she was a cunning engineer, and to compass this desirable union she had her own resources. The religious difficulty did not floor her—she remembered whose son Henri was. She recalled how she had brought his father, Antoine de Navarre, to Poissy, to lure him from his faith; how La Belle Rouet had succeeded where reason failed. History must, she thought, repeat itself. She had cozened Jeanne out of her husband; she could cozen her out of her son; he was twenty and ought not to be in leading-strings. He should again be urged to come to Court with his mother even more strongly than before; flattering hopes of concessions concerning creed should be held out; and, the pair once with her at Blois, she would easily corrupt young Henri. His convictions would crumble; the marriage would ensue; and Jeanne might return to Béarn alone. Never was train more artistically laid. There was only one thing Catherine left out—the strength of Jeanne's moral principles.

II

In the early Spring of 1571 Catherine's letters to Jeanne bore fruit. She consented to come to Court with her daughter, but she would not commit herself so far as to bring her son. Catherine saw herself defeated. In vain she pressed safe conducts upon Henri and urged the safety of their lives at her Court—her urgent desire to see them there. "Madame," Jeanne wrote in reply, "you tell me that you want to see us—and that it is not for any evil purpose. Forgive me if, when I read your letters, I felt an inclination to laugh. For you try to do away with a fear that I have never felt. I do *not* believe that you eat little children—as folk say you do."

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Jeanne's anxieties took another form, but she was too wise to let Catherine see it. She is one of the few ladies of her day whose letters are characteristic. Child and woman, they show her the same—impetuous, domineering and excessively human; simple, stately, intellectual, almost brutally candid; austere, yet full of love of life. Before she started, she got wind that the Papal Legate was at Blois—the fact being that the Pope, hearing of Jeanne's advent, had sent a Cardinal post-haste to oppose the match and to urge the reopening of relations with the Prince of Portugal. Jeanne refused to come to Blois while he was there, and Catherine, much against her will, was forced to give her rendezvous at Chenonceaux. When Jeanne and her daughter arrived, Catherine avenged herself for the absence of Henri. Standing on the threshold of her apartments, she waited for Jeanne to come to her; then she gave her the kiss of etiquette and kissed the little Princess Catherine on the forehead. Jeanne, in her turn, embraced Margot; then, already wearied by Statesshows, "I am terribly hungry," she exclaimed—and these were the first words she spoke at Court. "I am thirsty," said the giant-babe, Gargantua, when he opened his eyes upon the world. Jeanne, with her scorn of etiquette, was the true child of Nature and of Rabelais. After dinner, she and Catherine were closeted alone for several hours, and when Jeanne came out her face was radiant. "The marriage of my son and Marguerite is settled," she said. Catherine's manner had won her as it won Coligny, but that Jeanne should thus have been subjected is a greater test of the Queen-Mother's power. Margot also made advances, but when next day Jeanne went to Tours to await the Legate's departure from Blois, her own natural caution had returned. "Madame Marguerite," she wrote to her son, "has done me all possible honour and shown me all possible good cheer. She told me, too, with the utmost frankness, how much she likes you. If she goes on as she is now, if we keep in the good graces of her mother and the King, and also of his brothers, and if she embraces 'the religion,' we may call ourselves the happiest people on earth. And the kingdom of France and our House will participate alike in this felicity. On the other hand, considering her caution and good judgment, and supposing them used for her own faith, in case she remains obstinate concerning it, loving it as men say she does—why then there is but one issue possible: the marriage would be the ruin of our friends and of our country, and such a new source of strength to the Papists,

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that, helped by the strange goodwill the Queen-Mother bears us, we should be destroyed, together with the Churches of France. For the which cause, my son, if ever you should pray to God, I entreat you that it be at this present. For, in good sooth, I pray to Him unceasingly to guide me in these negotiations, and to grant that this marriage be not made in His wrath for our punishment, but in His mercy for His glory and our repose."

When Jeanne entered Blois, the Papal Legate, scarlet-hatted, scarlet-robed, was driving out of it in his heavy coach. It crossed that of Jeanne, but he turned away his head so that he might avoid saluting her. He carried back the most equivocal of messages—that "His Majesty would do nothing to prejudice his obedience to His Holiness." But the Cardinal had not been dismissed without a storm; the staunch Catholics objected to this attitude towards Rome, and Tavannes, for one, left the Court. He was among the Queen-Mother's oldest friends and had been her confidant throughout this business. "How can I find out what is really going on in *celle de Navarre*?" she had asked him after her first talk with Jeanne. "*Entre femmes*," replied the soldier-philosopher, "make her to be the first to lose her temper, and do you keep yours; you will then learn from her, not she from you." Catherine was dismayed at his departure. "Weary of the Queen's indecisions the Sieur de Tavannes took leave," writes a diarist; "she wept and implored him to stay, for she knew he had good counsel for their Majesties, who were left without any resolution." Nothing of this, however, showed in the King's welcome of Jeanne. He was all suavity, and affection. He called her his Great-aunt, his All, his Well-beloved, and heaped her with flattering attentions. Catherine was at first bland enough outwardly—she remembered Tavannes' injunctions; but the claw soon began to pierce the fur; she meant to make her own conditions and to humiliate the woman from whom she asked them. Perhaps, with the exception of Coligny, there was no one she hated like Jeanne. It was the hatred of the crooked for the straight, of the casuist for the person who saw through her. The vehement Jeanne suffered torment in putting the curb upon her tongue. "The Queen," she said, "made her die by pin-pricks." "I am in pains of travail," she wrote to Henri—"My patience passes that of Griselda. I have no liberty to talk, either with the King or Madame Marguerite. I am only allowed conversation with the Queen-Mother, who

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consistently treats me *à la fourche*. . . . They hurried me here in fine fashion ; but they are not in any hurry to see me."

She found nobody to whom to turn. Her niece, Marie de Clèves, and her cousin, the young Princesse de Condé, were both at Court, but they only served to irritate her.

"They are," she wrote, "as much alike as two fingers of one hand, laughing at every one and everything, and I am their prey like the rest. I find them entirely changed, in a fashion as strange as it is bad. As for your cousin (Henri de Condé), if you cannot make love better than he does, I advise you to give it up altogether."

She did not leave this subject here—she sent her son a whole manual of instructions in the princely art of courtship. "Look well to three main things," she said ; "adapt your manners to your company, and speak boldly, even when taken aside ; for remember that you make, at your first coming, the impression that every one will keep of you. Train your hair to stand up ; but not in the fashion of Nérac ; there must be pieces hanging at either side. I recommend the last thing out to you, because it is the one which most takes my fancy. But be on your guard against every kind of effort to debauch you, whether in your senses or your faith, and build up against *them* a great and invincible constancy. For I know this is what *they* mean to do ; they make no secret of it. . . . And since you possess the true light—since also they spy upon your actions—take care to go to *Prêches* and Prayers, for you see by what the Queen says that they lose no chance of making capital.

"Your good mother and best friend," Jeanne signs herself, and her only happy hours were spent in writing to her boy. But the internecine warfare with Catherine did not leave her too much time for correspondence.

It was not easy for the combatants to mask their hatred for one another. The Queen-Mother's cool temper gave her a certain advantage, but Jeanne had the force of her resolve that Henri should not come to Court. "Madam," said Catherine at an early interview, "you always keep to generalities ; what if we came to the point ?" "Very well," retorted Jeanne, "but first you must accede to my demands." "Then," quoth Catherine, "let us stop here. You are free to stay at the Court ; you will be well considered and well treated, and if your son likes to come, he shall be cherished in like manner." She was playing crane to Jeanne's fox, but the fox, unlike the fox in the fable, refused her tender ministrations. "My son,"

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was her answer, " will not come until all is arranged as it should be." " In that case," Catherine rejoined, " the best thing to do is to put an end to our intercourse, and lay the matter in the hands of men whom we trust." " Madam, I trust no one in the world—I mean to conduct this business myself." For the moment Jeanne had the last word. " Because matters here," she wrote (again to her son), " must be watched by one's own eye and felt by one's own fingers, I beg you not to budge from Béarn till you get another despatch from me. Supposing you have started, invent some pretext, such as you will easily find, and return home. That is my opinion and that of those who best understand the affairs of this place. All their talk is of making you come, and that quickly, even before we reach the conclusion, which (the Queen has twice or thrice told me) depends entirely upon *you*. For I see clearly that that Lady imagines that all I say comes from myself alone, and that you have opinions apart from mine—besides, as you know, that is what the King tells her. Pray, when you write, be sure to say that you entreat me to remember all that you told me ; above all, to find out Madame Marguerite's will about religion. And add that this is the only thing which keeps you from a final decision, so that if I show the Queen-Mother this, under your hand, she will the rather believe it is *your* view, and that will help us to advance it. I can assure you I am in sore plight, for they brave me with surpassing insolence, and I have every patience in the world."

And, rather later, to de Beauvoir, Henri's tutor, her trusty counsellor—

" As for outward honours, they still show me quite enough of that sort ; excepting that they want to deprive me by their subtleties of that to which I have been accustomed—to wit that the King advance to meet me and conduct me to his mother. But, through counter-subtleties, I have won the day. For if one wants any good thing here, one must take it by ambush, before they think of it. Even when they have promised, they have their say and unsay (*leur dû et leur dédit*, as in the contract with England. They are just the same with the Germans ; and so they go on wavering ; now from fear of them (the Germans), now from fear of the Pope and the Catholics. They would love to cheat them all. As for me, I fortify myself from one hour to another with the grace of God, and, rest assured, that I remember your advice to me not to lose my temper, for they try me to the end of my tether.

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I show the most beautiful patience that ever you heard of. I believe that they are only trying to exasperate me in order to force me into an appeal for arbitration."

"The most beautiful patience that ever you heard of" was put to further trials by Catherine.

"The Queen," she writes later to Beauvoir, "almost wanted to persuade me that Brodeau had told the truth, and that *you* had given him hopes that my son would be married by proxy, according to the Catholic rites. 'Madam,' I said to her, 'I find it a little difficult to believe that M. de Beauvoir said that, for he himself tells me that he assured you that it could not be done.' 'You think,' said she, 'that he told me he would tell you?' 'No, I think not,' said I. At last, seeing herself hard pressed, and also that I did not believe her, 'Yes, he certainly did tell me something; you may take that for truth, Madam,' quoth she, 'but it was something very far from what you fancy.' She then burst out laughing, for never (and pray take note of this) does she speak to me without making fun of me. . . . She unsaid many of the things she had said to M. Biron, as well as others spoken in his presence. He is at the end of his cunning and knows not what to say. On the one hand, he stands in fear of the Queen; on the other, I reproach him (but in jest) because, I say, he has played me false. He shrugs his shoulders, and tries to make excuses for the Queen as best he may."

"Never does she speak to me without making fun of me"—the words, more than any analysis, give the picture of these two opposed spirits: of her who thought that she could stab seriousness by never taking it seriously; and of the grave woman, much more humorous than Catherine, whose earnestness was inwrought with her being.

Jeanne now refused to proceed further without consulting the English Ambassadors, Smith and Walsingham, then staying at Blois; and she begged the King's permission (which was unwillingly granted) to ask some ministers of her faith to join them. "I have the wolf by the ears," she said when they met, "and yet you find me still undecided. There is danger in concluding this marriage; there is danger in not concluding it. The King and the Queen-Mother wish my son to live at Court after the marriage, and they do not want to grant him the free exercise of his religion. They think that they will thus make an atheist of him. But, on their side, they exact that when Madame Marguerite comes to Béarn she shall

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celebrate Mass at her will. The Papists will take her part and we shall have another civil war." Then she questioned the ministers concerning technical details. "Can I," she asked, "allow the wedding ceremony to be performed by a priest in a surplice and stole?" They held a long discussion together. "The matter is in itself indifferent," was their verdict, "but all the same, it might cause scandal to the weaker brethren." "Then never will I permit the rite!" she cried: "it would be offering an offence to God." The black-gowned Calvinists were of opinion that she should not go against her conscience; they invoked "*Salomon et plusieurs autres rois de Juda*," as warnings against these "mixed marriages"; and "it seemed to most men," wrote Walsingham to Burleigh, "as if the match were broken off." "But that is not my view," he added, "there are too many reasons which make it necessary."

There remained one as yet untried expedient—a direct appeal from Jeanne to Marguerite. This was no easy matter, as Catherine hardly allowed her daughter to stir from her side. And when the Princess went to her own apartments, her *Gouvernante* was instructed to keep her always within ear-shot. When at length Jeanne contrived a private interview, she did not waste time. What did Madame Marguerite feel, she asked, about a change in her religion? "I have been brought up in the Catholic religion," the Princess answered sturdily, "and I never will abandon it, were it for the greatest monarch in the world." "That was not what I was told," said the other; "had I known it, I should never have embarked on this." Again it was surprising that she did not put an end to the affair. But Jeanne, honest woman that she was, was also a Queen and subject to the doom of Queens. Her principles were strong, stronger than those of any princess of her day, but her ambition for her son was even stronger. Walsingham was right—the negotiations went on.

Her trials by no means decreased. "I tell you again," she wrote to Beauvoir, "that if I had to live another month like this, I should be ill, and I really do not know that I am not ill now, for I certainly do not feel comfortable. . . . I am amazed I can endure the vexations that I suffer, for *they* scratch me, and they prick me, and they flatter me, and they brave me, and they want to draw me for all I'm worth without letting *themselves* go for a moment. They make holes in my room and in my dressing-closet so that they may play the spy upon

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me. In short I have no one here but Martin who walks straight (in spite of his gout)—and Monsieur le Comte who tries to do me all the good offices he can, and sees clearly that one can't trust courtier men."

Could she have grown fond of the bride, she might have felt more heartened for her task, but Marguerite's character was not one to suit her. "Madame," she tells her son, "has beauty and grace and good abilities, but she has been bred up in the most accurst and rotten company. Here it is not the men who solicit the women, it is the women who solicit the men. If you were here you could never escape excepting by the great grace of God."

And she sends a like picture to de Beauvoir.

"For these two days past, I find Madame grown quite cool. The gossip is that they are all going to Paris. . . . As for her beauty, I own that she has a fine figure, but then she laces very tightly. And when one comes to her face, the beauty is so much helped that it annoys me, for she will really spoil herself. But at this Court, paint is almost common, as in Spain. You cannot think how pretty *my* girl looks here. Every one assaults her religion. She stands up to them and does not yield one jot. And everybody loves her."

Jeanne was right. The Valois Court was no place for a girl of sixteen who came straight from the high-souled Court of Navarre. It was natural that her mother's wholesome nature should sicken in the stifling atmosphere.

"The King will stay on here" (at Blois), she wrote. "He makes love passionately, but he does it in such a fashion that he thinks no one knows anything about it. He has lodged his mistress in a room apart, to which he goes straight from his closet; and about nine or ten o'clock every night he pretends to go and work at a book that he is writing. But he really goes to her, and remains with her till one o'clock. They say he is following a régime, but this is only another pretext to give him liberty. . . . Oh the pity of this Court! I am most miserable in it."

By this time Jeanne had secured so many promises that she could not well hold out any longer, and, on April 11, she signed the agreement of marriage. The only remaining difficulty was to get the Papal dispensation, for the Vatican maintained its uncompromising attitude. "*Ma tante*," exclaimed Charles one day, "I honour you more than the Pope, and I fear him less than I love my sister. I am not a Huguenot,

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but I am not a fool. So if Monsieur le Pape plays the donkey too long, I will myself take Margot by the hand and will have her married *en pleine prêche*." The death, on May 1, of Pope Pius V, and the accession of Gregory XIII, with all the business that such events involved, complicated the situation. The Cardinal de Guise was despatched to Rome, but the business lagged. Guise did not return, and it began to seem probable that Charles would put his boast in execution. The only other way out would be to make the bridegroom conform, and to have the full Catholic ceremony. But as long as Jeanne was there, this was impossible.

CHAPTER VII
Coligny and the Netherlands

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CATHERINE, meanwhile, was blowing cold upon the intended campaign in the Low Countries. When it came to the point she could not bring herself to face a break so absolute with Spain and all the consequences it involved. She also wished to keep well with Elizabeth, who, against all expectation, did not fancy the notion of the French as her rivals in the Netherlands. Besides this, there was her hostility to Coligny. Jealousy of him was more than ever the ruling motive of her conduct. For the first time in his life, Charles was in opposition to her. Coligny now possessed his will as thoroughly as she had hitherto possessed it, and the King was set upon the war. Indeed he urged Coligny to hasten it for motives not dissociated from his mother. Charles could watch, as none outside could, the growth of the plots against the Admiral, and he knew that his only chance of safety lay in his departure from the kingdom.

The Flemish were as eager as the King. Crushed by the cruelties of Alva and the bigotry of Philip, they found no unity among themselves to raise their fortunes. Never was country so distraught by religious sects promiscuously mixed. There were Spanish Catholics; there were Anti-Spanish Catholics, making common cause with the Lutherans; there were Calvinists; there were Anabaptists; and, in their midst, stood the one person who could bring order from the chaos. This was William of Orange, who saw clearly that his only natural allies were the French, since Elizabeth of England was fickle and mysterious. He was thus as keen as Coligny for the pact betwixt him and France, as keen, but for different reasons; Orange at this moment cared most for a political alliance, while the religious bond was all-important to the Admiral.

Preparations went forward and the French army entered the Netherlands. Thus, with fair hopes, began a war which,

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had Coligny lived, might have proved the war of his ideals—a struggle for tolerance and truth. Its beginnings were bound to be small. It was, so to speak, a semi-private enterprise following upon a secret pact, even though the King was a party to it; an enterprise undertaken in the name of Orange and Nassau, its leaders. But had Charles stood firm, it would have meant a campaign on a grand scale, and Coligny himself would most probably have gone to the Low Countries to command it in person. It would have been an acknowledged expedition, bringing open rupture with Spain. As it was, no doubt Philip would have acted, had not his forces been wanted elsewhere. The Turk was still occupying his energies on one side, while the Netherlands demanded them on the other. The moment was a favourable one, but the King's weakness and Catherine's prevarications spoiled all. The war was bound to fizzle out and to end in disappointment. One result of import it had—it kept Catherine on tenter-hooks about Spain, for whatever Philip's distractions, she neither knew his resources, nor at what moment he might turn against her. This, indeed, he might do in any case, and until she felt more certain of his course, she would not definitely quarrel with the Protestants, or lose her chance of power in the Netherlands.

In the earliest days of the campaign, there was happily no presage of its end. All seemed propitious.

In May, the Admiral's heart was gladdened by the taking of Valenciennes by Nassau, and of Mons by Genlis. His own presence was still necessary in France, and at that moment he was in Paris. We get a pleasant picture of him falling in with Brantôme and Strozzi at the Château de Madrid, where the King liked to spend the Spring. The three were taking a forest walk in the leafy Bois de Boulogne. "God be praised," said he, "all goes well. Soon we shall have chased away the Spaniard . . . and made the King master, or we shall all die, and I the first. I shall not complain if I die in so good a cause. . . ." But supplies were inadequate; there were delays in sending reinforcements. Coligny was aware of the risk. "In sooth," said he, "the only danger is in the protracting of time . . . and in too late resolving." Soon after, came Genlis from the Netherlands, disguised like Nassau before him, to beg the King for more help, or Mons would fall. On July 15, he crossed the frontier with four thousand infantry and some horse. In vain. On the 17th, the Spaniards entered the town and sacked it with sickening cruelty. Genlis himself

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was taken prisoner—the crowning point of a calamity disastrous to the prospects of the French in the Netherlands.

But the King's purpose still did not change. His confidence in the Admiral was unshaken, and he was bent on pursuance of the war. Catherine, whose hopes the late events had raised, saw herself well-nigh routed. M. de Sauve and the Comte de Retz, her spy and the King's *Gouverneur*, poisoned her mind with their tidings. They recounted the King's every word, his secret counsels—assuring her that if she did not look to it, the Huguenots would entirely possess him. "Before she thought of anything else," they said, "she must regain her power as a mother, which Coligny had stolen from her." The moment was a good one : it was summer, and the Admiral was absent at Châtillon. Gathering herself together, Catherine prepared for a final attempt. She was not a Medici for nothing—she tried a dramatic effect. She was spurred on by disappointed ambition : "unmeasured and inflamed ambition," says Tavannes, "which burned the Queen within and without and urged her to get rid of the Admiral."

It is to the pen of the same chronicler that we owe the picture of what followed. "The King goeth forth to hunt at Mont-pipeau. The Queen, his mother, hasteneth after him. Shut up with him in his closet, she bursteth of a sudden into tears. 'After all the pains,' quoth she, 'that I had to bring you up, and to preserve your Crown—the crown which Huguenots and Catholics alike did their best to snatch from your hand—after having sacrificed myself for you and run a thousand dangers, how could I ever have dreamed that you would reward me thus miserably? You hide yourself from me, from me who am your mother, in order to take counsel of your enemies; you wrench yourself from my arms, which have guarded you, to lean on the arms of those who once desired to kill you. I know that you hold secret counsels with the Admiral—that you wish to plunge us rashly into war with Spain; to offer your kingdom, yourself, and our persons as a prey to those of "the Religion." If so be that this grief befall me, give me leave, I pray, before it cometh, to retire to the land of my birth. And send away also your brother, who may call himself unhappy in that he hath spent his life to preserve yours. At least give him time to escape from the enemies he hath made in serving you—Huguenots who, while they prate of war with Spain, wish for a war in France, and for the ruin of all States, that they alone may flourish.'"

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never have been the power they were. He has left out the smallest and the strongest group, who made the force of all the rest : the men of fine purpose and strong faith who found their embodiment in Coligny. The power of such characters was incalculable, and even impressed their opponents, more especially when it was embodied in the practical piety of their clergy. The Catholic Correro himself is not slow to acknowledge their virtue. " Their ministers " (he continues) " were used to exercise the ministry with a skill and a fervour incredible. . . . And if our priests were to give themselves the half of the trouble *they* take, certes Christianity would not be in the disorder in which we find it at this moment. These ministers often made collections in their churches, and the poor themselves contributed, largely and with a good will."

Facts of this kind had a potent vitality which political weapons could not kill—which, as well as greed and ambition, made proselytes to " the Religion." The power of disinterestedness is great—to the nobles it was practically unknown. "*Les Grands*," concludes the same critic, " would be glad enough to find a cure for all these ills, but without renouncing one of their advantages. . . . It is wiser never to mix oneself up with ecclesiastical affairs. Things spiritual have always been separate from things temporal ; the two sides of life are incompatible, and, in trying to fuse them, men confound them. They entangle themselves, and with their breath they light a fire which can nevermore be extinguished."

Catherine, although she did not know it, was busy storing fuel for the flames. The marriage-compact once signed by Jeanne, arrangements for the ceremony went on apace. The dispensation had not yet arrived, but Charles was still resolved to do without it. It was at this juncture that Jeanne was induced to leave Blois and go to Paris to prepare for the wedding. It was the end of May when she got there ; on June 4 she fell ill ; on the 9th she died. Legend tells of a pair of gloves, or, as some say, a necklet, that she bought from an Italian hosier and perfumer, whose shop, under royal patronage, was on the quays opposite the Louvre. But legend, as often, spoke false. It was true that there was such a shop—that its owner was an artist in poisons—that Catherine bought perfumes, perhaps gloves and necklets there ; but no evidence shows that Jeanne had been there, or that Catherine had given her any present. What is known is that she caught a chill, that inflammation followed, and that when her body



JEANNE D'ALBRET EN 1570.

BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE.

FRANÇOIS CLOUET.

From a photograph by A. Giraudon.

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was examined she was found to be far gone in consumption. She is not the first person who has lived unconscious of the mortal ill devouring her, and, under the circumstances, her death, so advantageous to the Catholics, was bound to be ascribed to poison. But among the many sins of the Court, this one need not be laid at their door.

Death was not unwelcome to her. "Life is wearisome," she said to the minister at her bedside—"from my youth upwards, I have suffered misery." Her only cause for sorrow, she told him, was the separation from her children. Her servants were weeping around her—she reproved them with some asperity. She sent for her daughter and gave her words of lucid counsel. She made her will. She spoke with her wonted clearness up to the last hour of her life.

So, at forty-two years of age, died Jeanne de Navarre, Puritan, Humanist, and Stateswoman, a Stoic who hated asceticism, a woman endowed with the mind, but not the heart, of a man. "She had nothing feminine except her sex," Tavannes says; but perhaps he hardly realized how much the word "sex" implies. Her passion for the weak but brilliant husband who cruelly betrayed and disillusioned her filled all the first years of her womanhood. But the strongest feeling of her life was her love for her son. Next to that came her reverence for Coligny, the only man who really influenced her. If he and she—if force, faith and intellect—had joined hands and ruled France together, Protestantism might have prevailed. But it was written that it could not be. They and their strenuous creed alike were repugnant to the self-preserving gay French temperament. Killed by invisible poisons more deadly than any drugged perfumes, Jeanne and her cause lay dead. It was not three months before the massacre of St. Bartholomew.

The contemporary mentions of the event are most conventional, but there is one of them which is not—the picture painted by the woman who was to have been her daughter-in-law. It shows no sort of feeling except a malice which death could not quench; and a scorn for the simplicity of Protestantism which makes us grasp more than any theological argument why it was that Princes and Princesses clung so tenaciously to Catholicism, with its splendid paraphernalia and its courtly etiquette.

"Madame de Nevers (the widow of the murdered Duke, François de Guise, now married to the Duc de Nevers), the lady whose temper you know well" (Marguerite wrote),

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"came with Monsieur the Cardinal de Bourbon, Madame de Guise (Henri's wife), Madame the Princesse de Condé, her sisters and myself, to the Hôtel of the late Queen of Navarre in Paris, that we might acquit ourselves honourably of the last duty that we owed—both to her rank and to the relationship that there was between us. Not, however, with the pomps and rites of our religion, but with the meagre show permitted by *Huguenotterie*. She lay in her ordinary bed, the curtains open without tapers, without priests, without Cross or Holy Water, and, for us, we stood at five or six paces from her bed with the rest of the company, only looking at her. Madame de Nevers, whom, when she was alive, the Queen hated more than anyone on earth (the which feeling that lady richly returned both in ill-will and in ill-words—and *you* know with what skill she could use them to those she detested)—she, I say, stepped forth from our group, and with several splendid, deep and humble curtseys she came near to the bed, and, taking the Queen's hand, she kissed it; then, with another deep curtsey, wondrously full of respect, she returned and took her place among us. And we, who had known their hatred, could value the scene at its true worth."

The whole affair is, as it were, an epitome of the bitterness and hollowness of the times. But it brings out something else of which the writer had no notion—the austere dignity of the lonely Queen upon her sober Protestant death-bed, passing from the world as she had lived in it, without any of the trappings of existence.

The loss of the Queen of Navarre was a terrible blow to Coligny. It came at a moment when he was disillusioned and depressed. The Huguenots, we know, were not what he had thought them. We have looked at their position as a whole, and now it is interesting to glance at the way in which Coligny viewed them. It seemed to him, as to Corroero, that the bulk had no real wish for moral reform and only cared to quarrel over dogma. He saw that some remained faithful; suffering persecution and all the bitter hardships of homelessness; singing psalms of Exodus by the wayside. But quite as many were violent and used their tenets as a cloak for lawlessness. It was significant that some of them used arquebuses for bells to summon their congregations to *Prêches* in their private houses; while every Northern pirate could call himself a Protestant and find a home in all-embracing La Rochelle. And the Admiral had another cause for sadness. The popularity

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of Calvin's creed had passed; religious excitement had grown stale, and France, most Anti-Puritan of nations, had tired, as it seemed, of Protestantism. When he looked outside his own country, the aspect did not greatly encourage him. Elizabeth was duplex and England jealous, doing its best to thwart France in the Netherlands at the very moment when the French King was prepared to risk all against Spain. Even the Prince of Orange had "inexplicable hesitations"—due to the disorganization of his Protestants, the sects and divisions that weakened them—and he had cooled in his bearing towards Coligny. In Paris, too, all was inimical. The Clergy were denouncing the liberal policy of the King—the Jesuits threatened him from the pulpit. "If," darkly hinted their preacher Sorbin—Special Preacher also to Charles—"he still allowed the marriage with Navarre, the rights of the elder brother, Esau, would probably be given to Jacob." The King grew seriously alarmed. The sense of this, joined to his own weariness, were not encouraging for Coligny. Meanwhile, unable to face despondency, Charles tried to drown low spirits in mad hunting. Did the Admiral begin to apprehend that, in spite of good instincts and affection, his young master was not all that he had dreamed; that the boy he had loved and believed in was incapable of realizing his hopes; that, independable, unsound, he would never be the salvation of France? A fuller disappointment was to come. A few weeks later, Catherine made the scene, already pictured, which sounded the whole depth of Charles's weakness.

The letters of warning which flowed in to Coligny were not reassuring. "Remember the commandment that every Papist obeys—Thou shalt not keep faith with a heretic," wrote an unknown correspondent. "If you are wise, you will get away as quickly as you can from this infected sewer, the Court." To all such monitions, Coligny had but one answer. "It is better," he said, "to die a hundred deaths than to live in perpetual suspicion. As for me, I have been on the earth long enough."

In this sad frame of mind he went to Châtillon. It was the end of June; the home of his heart was in full beauty, his wife was there to comfort and to minister, and a new happiness awaited them, for Jacqueline was expecting a child. Here, if anywhere, his spirit would find healing. At first, serious illness overtook him. "He would have made a better recovery," wrote his wife to Renée of Ferrara, "had he not had

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an infinity of headbreakings—State affairs and Church affairs alike." But these anxieties only served to furnish fresh proof of her devotion, and, as he grew better, peace returned.

Here, in his birthplace at Châtillon, strolling and reading, talking with wife and children, superintending his "College," we have the last serene picture of Coligny. It is worth dwelling on because it is the last, and because we can look at it in detail. The pen of one who probably knew him, the son of that François Hotman who had walked with him in his garden-alleys, has chronicled the tenor of his life, one day of which flowed on like another.

For sleep he allowed himself seven hours at most, and, like many other great men, he was sparing in his diet. His private prayers followed his waking; and every other day he had a family service, with that singing of psalms which he loved. After that, deputies from the churches, public affairs of all sorts, took him up until the dinner hour. For him this meal was a Christian function, a feast of brotherly love. All the servants gathered round the table, at the head of which he stood with his wife. Soldiers and captains, old friends of the field, dropped in often; a minister or two was always there; and his boys, François and Odet. His newly married daughter, Louise, and her husband, Téligny, were constant guests, and, more seldom, some great Huguenot noble who would stop there on his way to Paris. A psalm was sung; grace was said; good talk followed, and, the cloth once withdrawn, a minister gave a benediction. A common meal at morning or at evening was dear to the Admiral's heart; even amid the hardships of camp he never liked to miss it for a day. There were but few of his practices which were not imprinted with that innate courtesy which endeared him to all who met him. The Huguenot gentry took his daily habits as their model, and his meals of fraternity and equality became the custom of the country-side.

It was probably when others retired to sleep that Coligny found time to write his Memoirs. Since the Treaty of St. Germain, he had never let a day go by without noting in his diary "the things worthy of memory during all the years of the religious troubles." When, after his death, they were brought to the King, his "greatest foes," it was recorded, "were compelled to admiration, by reason of the sweetness of his spirit and its deep tranquillity." Kindness and moderation, an inborn simplicity, the power of spreading peace

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about him, these were the marks by which at home this man of war and of conviction was best recognized. "Never did he gain riches," says his chronicler—"not so much as a farmstead, or a single foot of earth."

In his troubled life it is not surprising that the Book of Job should have been his favourite reading—his great consolation, as he called it—and that, and Calvin's Commentary upon it, were seldom far from his hand. Perhaps his piety showed most impressively in his preparation for the Lord's Supper. He taught his household himself, and would gather all his family together to make up any difference that there might be among them. "I would rather be alone in the world," he said, "than feed and clothe a train of evil men." To the subject of the Sacrament itself he had for years given his deepest meditations, fearless of the goal to which they brought him. Once, in earlier times, when he was about to receive it, he proclaimed that he denied the Real Presence and demanded a discussion with the minister. The Calvinist talked for a long time of the mystical nature of the service, and Coligny ended by taking the Communion in great humility. In his later years he could hardly have done so, for he adopted the tenets of certain Swiss Protestants and believed in the Lord's Supper only as a holy meal of fellowship, to be partaken of in remembrance of his Saviour. We find, indeed, more latitude of creed among the Protestants than generally appears.

There must have been something singularly persuasive about this man of thought and action, which only grew with his years. "His voice was low and pleasant, but his speech was something slow and halting. . . . He was of middle stature, his step, his gestures, showed a fitness and a gracious gravity. . . . The colour of his cheeks was red; his face was calm and serene."

He was not left long in peace. Early in August he was called back to Court. Letters of warning again reached him, with the same result as before. As he mounted his horse to start, one of his peasants fell upon his knees before him. "Ah, Monsieur, ah, my good master," he cried, "why do you go to your ruin? I shall never see you again if you reach Paris. You will die there, you and all those who journey with you." Coligny rode off. He did not return again to Châtillon.

It was during this sojourn there that Catherine had arranged her successful *coup de théâtre* at Montpipeau, and she had further utilized his absence to clinch her influence over her

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son. When Coligny, ignorant of these events, reached Paris, he found an unexpected state of things—a cold welcome and an estranged sovereign. The reason of his summons was an important one. Catherine had convened a military Council to determine the question of the war. When, on August 9, Coligny arrived in its midst, its conclusions were already foregone; its members were all Catholic nobles, bitterly opposed to any expedition he might command, although many of them saw the splendid chances that the scheme offered and would gladly have taken part in it, had its leader been one of themselves. Coligny, unconscious of their hatred, appeared serene in the confidence of the King's support, and of a successful issue. He was amazed at the unanimous opposition to a project which he had regarded as settled. Turning to Charles—"Since the contrary opinion to mine hath won the day, I have nothing more to tell you," he said, "but I am certain beforehand that you will live to repent of it. And your Majesty must not be offended that, having promised service and aid to the Prince of Orange, I do not break my word. But it shall be with my own friends that I will help him, with my own relations and servants, if needs be with my own person." His eyes left the King's face and fixed themselves upon Catherine. "His Majesty," he continued, "refuses to adventure the war. God grant that he be not overtaken by another from the which he will have no power to retreat." He took his leave with fearless dignity. "His courage is invincible," wrote Walsingham to Burleigh after the Council, and no man needed courage more. When Catherine was questioned by the Venetian envoy as to whether she intended war with Spain—"Assure the Signory," she answered, "that not only my words, *but their results*, shall prove the firmness of my resolution." Had Coligny been subject to presentiments, he might have known that his doom was sealed.

CHAPTER VIII
Les Noces Vermeilles

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Les Noces Vermeilles

THE Admiral's presence at Court worked the wonted spell, and the King's coldness did not last long. His old warmth revived, although, under his mother's Argus-eye, he held firm about the war.

"The King constantly says that he will have nothing to do with the Netherlands, but the Admiral is with him every day. Indeed the Admiral and the Court seem to be keeping house together." So wrote a French agent to Granvella, not long after Coligny's return to Paris. He was unwilling to give up hope—his scheme was too near his heart ; nor could he finally resolve to abandon his faith in Charles. He made excuses for him. "Look at the King," he said, "Machiavelli is his Bible." One day he pressed him again to take his courage in both hands and resolve upon war with Spain. The King laughed and "begged for a few days' grace to frolic and to rollick in." "On my faith as a King," he said, "I will not budge from Paris until I have utterly contented you." And he probably believed his own words, hardly conscious that before the day was over Catherine would have got out of him every word that had passed between him and Coligny. Nor did the Admiral try to propitiate her—his tongue was franker than ever. At that moment it seemed probable that the throne of Poland would soon fall vacant. The Queen had died, the King was dangerously ill, and, if his death supervened, would leave no heir behind him. The competition for the crown would then be open to various claimants, and it was one of Catherine's cherished schemes that Anjou should gain the prize and rule the Poles. But Anjou himself hung back and was unwilling to face the prospect. "If Monsieur," exclaimed Coligny impulsively, "who would have none of England by marriage, will now have none of Poland by election, well, then, let him say straight out that he does not desire to leave France." This was a rash remark because it was a true one. Coligny saw

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that, as before, Anjou's game was to keep jealously near the person of his brother.

The knowledge that he was found out did not increase the Duke's love for the Admiral. He was already bitter enough against him and as suspicious as Catherine. "The Queen, my mother, and I," he wrote in his "Confession," "had already noticed three or four times that when the Amiral de Châtillon had been privily entertaining the King, as often happened (and very long were the conferrings between those two quite alone)—if, then, when the Admiral had left him, my mother or I approached the King to discuss affairs, or even only pleasures with him, we would find him wondrous cold and stormy, with lowering brow and a rough countenance. And once when I had asked where he was and some one had made answer that he was in his Privy Closet, whence the Admiral had just come forth after a long time with him alone, I went in suddenly, as usual. But as soon as my brother saw me, without speaking a word, he began to stride up and down in fury, often looking at me askance and with a very evil eye, sometimes laying his hand on his dagger in so hostile a fashion that I expected he would seize me by the neck and stab me. And so I did my best to keep my head. And for that he continued this manner of walking and this strange countenance, I felt sore perturbed at having come there. For I thought of the danger in which I stood, but still more I thought of getting away; the which I effected with such good skill that while he paced, with his back turned towards me, I swiftly retreated to the door. Opening it, and with a shorter bow than that at my entry, I made my exit, hardly noticed by him till I was out. Yet could I not make it so sudden but that he found the time to throw me two or three more baleful glances, without speaking, or doing aught else. Nor did I do aught to him excepting to close the door softly behind me and wish myself joy on my escape. But that same moment I went to find the Queen-Mother, to whom I told the whole; and when we had joined this last meeting to all the rumours and suspicions we had heard, we each of us, so to speak, felt certain that the Admiral it was who had imprinted evil thoughts concerning us upon the King."

This was perilous enough for Coligny. And grave warnings came again from his friends. "The hands which are preparing themselves for you," says one, "are the hands that made the massacre of Vassy." Once more Coligny urged the good-

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ness of the King : " more benign," he called him, " than any who have mounted the seat of the Fleurs-de-lys." " But whether there be danger or no, I would rather," he cried, " be dragged through the mud than again see civil war in the land."

An alliance with England was signed this month ; and the rumour of this union, of Alençon's matrimonial prospects, and still more of the marriage with Navarre, which was now imminent, filled Alva with wrath and disappointment. The fortunes of Spain seemed to be seriously threatened, and, had Coligny been rightly supported, the sovereignty of France in the Netherlands might have been something more than a dream. As it was, Alva, who, like Catherine, believed in necromancy, went in his despondency to a wizard whom he consulted about the future. " He was not to fear," was the answer, " his luck would be restored by magic ; before two weeks were out '*on verrait merveille*.' " Alva's courage returned, and a fortnight had not quite gone by when the world had seen the massacre of St. Bartholomew.

Charles IX was full of spasmodic presentiments which filled him with vague alarm. The only expedient he could think of to stave off impending evil was to force an official reconciliation between the Admiral and Henri de Guise, who had, six years earlier at Blois, refused to give the kiss of peace. He was now in Paris, for the Guises had made a pretext of the approaching wedding and had come to town in force, with an immense and motley retinue of beggars and poor gentlemen, adventurers and *bravos*, men who had nothing to lose by committing crime. With vengeance so well within reach, Duke Henri could afford to play the hypocrite—it was indeed more politic to do so—and, with murder in his heart, he gave the Admiral his hand. That he would meet no opposition to any designs he might form either from Catherine or Anjou, he felt confident. The chief difficulty would be to get the consent of the King.

The Spanish Catholics, however, had no confidence in the French confederates. " I am very much afraid that the French will still play us false," ran a letter sent from Paris to Granvella. The Venetian envoy also wrote anxiously concerning reports of Protestant troops, who were gathering, as he heard, upon the frontier. Alva angrily sent an agent to inquire into the meaning of this, and war with Spain again did not seem unlikely. Had the English marriage then appeared

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probable, a Protestant alliance would have been a necessity, and all would have been changed. But the moment was not propitious ; Elizabeth was clearly drawing back and Catherine was thrown on her own resources. She was very near despair ; the peace she strove for was once more on the verge of destruction, and by the hand of Coligny. The only road to safety lay, she believed, in assassination. But she still refused to formulate—to shape the how or when ; still dallied with herself and all around her. And it was this power of eluding facts, of waiting to give them body until they were close upon her, of temporizing till she could find some other on whose shoulders to bind the burden of responsibility, which made her countenance her own actions. To her, they were but deeds of convenience. Before she committed them, she never saw them as ugly as they were—after they were over, she never allowed herself to look at them. Her great preoccupation with the moment blinded her to all else. But it did not take away the sense of fear that had been her curse all through her life. And now she lived in constant panic. The atmosphere was full of dread ; every kind of rumour was in the air. And, true or untrue, these reports had significance ; they were the rumbling before the storm.

“The wedding will be blood-red,” said the people of Paris, as they watched the entry into the city, first of the Guisards, then of the Huguenots, who flocked there not only from Navarre, but from all parts of the country. The Catholics—and this is important—were lodged round about their leaders, while the Huguenots, owing to lack of room, were obliged to resort to scattered lodgings. As many as could took up their abode in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, but it was not nearly large enough to harbour them all.

And the citizens themselves ? Their temper was always fanatical, and now they seemed as if waiting for something. The shopmen shut up their shops, the merchants and citizens ceased to work, excepting the armourers who alone plied their busy trade. There was a clanking of arms from their smithies—grim music for the streets and the populace. The Provost of the Merchants protested to the King against the existing conditions and threatened to leave Paris, together with five hundred burghers. All was in disarray and the city was ready for action. There was a ballad sung about the town, made, probably, the winter before, which best shows the humour it was in.

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Paris, en ce temps froidureux
 Que les nuictz sont longues et fresches,
 Tu doy bien vieillir sur tous ceulx
 Qui font auprès de toy des presches.
 Si de brief tu ne les dépesches,
 Jamais paix n'auront les chrestiens ;
 Car ceulx que tu souffres et tiens
 Te causeront tant de courroux
 Que tu diras, toy et les tiens :
 Montaignes, tombez dessus nous.

* * * *

Leur volerie tant nous blesse,
 Qu'il ne fault avoir nul égard
 Non plus qu'au diable à leur noblesse,
 Mais les tuer sans nul égard,
 Et comme villains, d'une hard
 Les faire pendre et estrangler,
 Que la mort les puisse sangler,
 Et confondre au centre de terre,
 Puysequ'ilz n'ont vouloir se régler
 Selon l'église de St. Pierre.

The *temps froidureux* had passed, but the vogue of the song had not, and the dog-days had come upon Paris.

The preparations for the wedding went on, but the dispensation still tarried and no messenger had yet made his appearance. Catherine tried to persuade the Court favourite, the Cardinal de Bourbon, to officiate without it, but the Cardinal made difficulties. "That old bigot, with all his tomfooleries," said Charles, half laughing, to the Admiral, "is wasting a great deal of good time that really belongs to *ma grosse soeur, Margot*." All through the transactions with Rome Charles liked to show his anti-Papal leanings, a fact that did not help the Admiral, at whose door his heresies were laid. The Cardinal did not hold out long against the force of royal persuasion, and conveniently got rid of his scruples. There remained but one anxiety : lest, before the proceedings, an adverse answer should arrive from the Vatican and put an end to them. This Catherine was determined to prevent, and she took her measures. "I send you this hurried word," she wrote to the Governor of Lyons, on August 13, "to tell you that, as you love the service of the King, you will let no post through from Rome until Monday be past." There was one who would have welcomed the Pope's refusal—it was only the bride herself. To the last she kept the orthodox view, but her piety may not have been unconnected with the image of Henri de Guise.

Meanwhile, a few days before the ceremony, the bridegroom

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arrived—clothed in deep¹ mourning and followed by many friends. Charles came to meet him in state; every form was observed. There was no more chance of delay for Marguerite—she knew that she could not escape her fate.

The old love attended her to the altar and saw her united to the new. For on August 18, the wedding took place with great magnificence. Charles, uncertain of fanatical Paris, had forestalled any possible danger by spreading abroad a report that the dispensation had arrived. The Huguenots, too, were content, and, to the outward eye, all was smooth. "The King of Navarre and his suite," wrote his bride in after days, "had changed their mourning for exceeding rich and sumptuous apparel, and all the Court was dressed out as you know. . . . I was robed in royal fashion, with a crown and a cape of spotted ermine which covered the front of my bodice; and I shone with the crown jewels and glistened in my wide blue mantle, with its four yards of train which were borne by three princesses. The platform was decked as is the custom at the weddings of the Daughters of France, all hung and draped with cloth of gold, from the Bishop's Palace to Notre Dame—while the people suffocated below, in their efforts to see all the Court and the wedding procession pass along the platform to the church." The King Charles's dress and cap and dagger matched the rest in splendour, and cost a large fortune in themselves—five hundred to six hundred thousand crowns, according to the Venetian Ambassador. And Anjou, not to be outdone, wore two-and-thirty pearls in his hat, each one of twelve carats' weight. One hundred and twenty ladies and more followed in gleaming array, "bright with the glory of rich tissues and velvet of gold . . . and brocade stitched with silver."

It had been agreed that the bridegroom was neither to hear Mass, nor to cross the threshold of Notre Dame, and the Cardinal de Bourbon—"who received us," wrote Margot, married the pair, as they knelt before him, outside the great Western door of the church. All went well until the bride had to make her responses. She obstinately refused to open her mouth and say "yes," and the ceremony could not have gone on, had not the King laid his hand upon her head and forced her to bend in affirmation. While this strange service was proceeding, the Huguenot Coligny, to avoid it, remained inside the building, with the Constable's heretical son, Damville. Upon the walls of the Nave hung the banners of Jarnac and Montcontour, and



MARGUERITE DE VALOIS, REINE DE NAVARRE (LA REINE MARGOT)
(VERS 1573).

BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE.

ANONYME.

From a photograph by A. Giraudon.

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the Admiral showed them to his companion. "In a short time," he said passionately, "these will be torn down and replaced by others, better to see." Their solitude did not last long; the opaline bridal throng flooded the shadowy aisles. "When the Cardinal," continued Margot, "had spoken the wonted words outside, we walked again along the platform as far as the pulpit which divided the Nave from the Choir. And here there were two steps, the one leading down into the Choir, the other to bring you out of the church." She was then led up the Choir to the High Altar, where she heard the Mass; but Navarre left the church and betook himself to the court of the Bishop's Palace, where he paced up and down with Coligny until the Catholic rite should be concluded—some of his gentlemen following him, while the others strolled about the Nave.

The feasts and the pageants were endless, and tedious with the tedium of splendour, making a monotony of brilliance. Catholics and Huguenots crossed and recrossed each other in the dance, looked on at the same gorgeous ballets. But the masquerades were ominous and meant something more than roses and folly. They were of royal devising and the Guises may well have helped to produce them. In the "*Mystère de trois mondes*," in which one half of the Court was playing, while the other acted as its audience, Navarre and Condé, clad as knights, came into a paradise of nymphs; they were unexpectedly driven back to hell by the King and Anjou, who sent them to hobnob with the devils and then danced away with the nymphs, the bride herself of their number. And another time the Huguenot Princes were Turks (the Turks had just been beaten at Lepanto), and the King and his brother were Amazons who conquered them before the applauding courtiers.

Coligny was doubtless a spectator. He was heartsick and weary of the shows, and only longed to go home to his wife. But the Protestant Churches had begged him to stay in Paris—she must not expect him yet. He had written to her—for the last time.

"My dearest, my well-beloved Wife" (the letter ran)—

"To-day was completed the marriage of the King's sister with the King of Navarre. The next three or four days will be passed in pleasure and in banqueting, in masques and ballets and tourneys; after which, the King (so he assures me) will

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give up several days to the hearing of the divers complaints which arise in many parts of his kingdom by reason of the violation of the Edict. In which matter I am constrained to labour to the utmost of my power. And although I have the greatest wish to see you, I think we should both of us feel a strong remorse if I failed in care and duty upon this business. Nor will the delay so very much put off my departure but that I shall get leave to go forth next week from this city. Were I only to consult my own needs, I had far rather be with you than sojourn longer here at Court—and that for the reasons that I gave you when last we were together. But we must think of the public good before we think of private happiness. I shall have other things to tell you when I see you, the which joy I desire day and night. As for the rest, all that I can write at this present is that four o'clock of the afternoon was past to-day when the wedding Mass had been said. And in the meantime the King of Navarre and I strolled in a court outside the church with certain gentlemen of our Religion. . . . And now, dearest wife and well-beloved, I pray God to have you in His keeping.

“At Paris: this 18th of August, 1572. Rest assured that amid all these feastings and gaities, I shall not give offence to any—least of all to God.”

On that same day of the marriage another letter went from Paris. It was from Charles to the Governor of Lyons, to forbid any post to leave France for Italy during the six days that followed. He was anxious that no account of the heretical wedding, either from the Nuncio or the Guises, should reach Rome until enough time had elapsed for the arrival of an answer from the Vatican, and, if the dispensation should fail, he would give his own version of the ceremony. But his politic stoppage of the posts, with the secrecy for France that it ensured, was destined to serve other purposes.

II

Charles, like his mother, lived in panic. He feared that the Guises, surrounded as they were by their own men, would make some attempt on his person. Would it not be better, he asked Coligny, to send for the Arquebusiers of his Guard? Coligny said that he “should approve whatever His Majesty should do.” He knew the danger was for himself, not for

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Charles. Even then, at the eleventh hour, his friend, Duplessis-Mornay, had entreated him to lose no time in leaving Paris. He refused.

The evening of August 21 was to close the wedding festivities. That same night, while the Louvre was ablaze with light and jewels and the last Pavane was being danced, a stranger in search of rooms was given shelter in a lodging near by. He arrived very late with a companion, and was at once hurried up the stairs. One old woman and a servant were the only inmates of the place. The man who brought him was the steward of a Guise; the house to which he came belonged to the Chanoine de Villemur, who had once been a tutor of the Guises; and the name of the lodger was Tosinghi. As for the street in which he found himself, it was one well known to the Admiral, for it lay between his own Hôtel in the Rue Béthisy, and the Louvre, and his daily journey took him through it.

A Royal Council was held next morning, the 22nd, at the palace. When it was over, Coligny walked with the King to the tennis-court, and leaving him there with Guise and Téligny, set off for his own apartments. He was accompanied by a troop of friends, as many as nine or ten in all, and two were closer to him than the rest, a certain Quercy on his right, and one called Pruneaux on his left. He walked on slowly, reading a despatch which had just been handed to him. The sound of a shot rang through the air and Coligny's arm fell by his side. Amid the general consternation he alone had the presence of mind to point to the window above him, from which he was sure the gun had been fired. "Tell the King, at once," he said. "I can see now," he added sardonically, "what a noble fidelity was intended when the Duc de Guise made his peace with me." His followers rushed upon the house, forced the door, ran up the stairs. All that they found was the arquebus, smoking still, upon a table; he who had held it had fled; the stable of the Guises was behind the house; he had escaped upon one of their horses. At a later hour the weapon was examined; it was the gun of one of Anjou's guards. And had Tosinghi's aim not been impeded by the jutting window-sill, the shot would have done its work. The fault was not in the marksman's will.

Nor was it in the conception of the plot, which was complete enough. The original wish of Henri de Guise had been that his mother, the widow of the murdered Duke, herself should fire

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the shot, while the Admiral was in the courtyard of the Louvre—it is Salviati, the Nuncio, who records it. But this youthful taste for romantic crime was vetoed by the older counsellors who decided on more practical measures. There had probably been several secret councils—there were talks between Anjou and his mother. One such had taken place on the day of the Duke's strange and insane interview with Charles. "Thenceforward," wrote the Prince, in later times, "we were resolved to rid ourselves of the Admiral and to seek out in what manner we should do it, together with Madame de Nemours—the only person, as we judged, to whom we could discover our purpose, by reason of the hatred which she bore him." They sent, it would seem, for a Gascon, to whom to entrust the deed, but "having in fun made him show us the manner in which he would attack him whom we desired; and having well considered him, all his gestures, his speech and his expression, the which made us laugh and were our pastime, we determined that he was too light and scatter-brained, in spite of his daring and his courage, to sustain such an enterprise." Soon after this the right man was found, and the choice of the confederates—of Catherine and Anjou and the Guises—fell upon the Florentine, Tosinghi.¹

The King was still playing at tennis when Coligny's message was brought. He threw down his racquet in anger. "Shall I never have a moment's peace?" he cried, with a violent oath. Then hurriedly leaving the tennis-court, he shut himself up in his apartments, sending orders that his guards should turn away all outsiders who might then be in the palace. When Catherine heard the news, she had just sat down to dinner. Her face remained calm and impenetrable; she rose and left the room without a word. "I suppose from this that she expected it," wrote the Spanish envoy to Philip. Meanwhile Charles had sent the Royal Surgeon, the famous Ambroise Paré, a Huguenot and a man above all suspicion, to the Admiral. Paré hastened to Coligny's lodgings. At first he urged the amputation of the arm, because he thought that the bullet might be poisoned. Coligny at once acquiesced, but it was found that the measure would be needless. The forefinger—half of which was shot away—alone had to be sacrificed,

¹ So says the Venetian Michieli. Many say that the choice fell upon Maurevel (or Maurevert), the assassin of Mouy. Others assert that Bême was chosen. But the last French authorities give Tosinghi as the man.

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an operation which Coligny bore without a groan, performed though it was without opium and with an inefficient pair of scissors. After three attempts, Paré's skill triumphed and he extracted the bullet, his victim all the time consoling his friends, who stood round bewailing his sufferings. "They are but God's charities," he said. "Yes, sir," replied one of those at hand, "in truth we must thank Him for sparing your head and understanding." Was it Merlin, the Huguenot minister, dear to the Admiral, who said this? We know that he was there, and that Coligny whispered to the man who held him during the operation that Merlin should be told to give a hundred golden crowns on his behalf to the Huguenot Church in Paris. The onlookers had other things to think of; they fell into angry groups and made low-voiced conjectures as to his assailant. He overheard them. "I have no enemy but the Guises," he said; "all the same, I do not assert that it was they who struck the blow." Some of those near him started to their feet. "Let us go and kill the Guises," they cried. But Coligny sternly forbade them. It was not only Christianity that prompted him. He knew that any blood shed would mean the ruin of the kingdom.

The nerves of men in those days must have been different from ours. The rest of Coligny's morning went in receiving a series of visitors. Navarre and Condé came first. The other chiefs among the Protestants followed them. Navarre and Condé went straight from the Admiral to the King. They asked permission to leave Paris, which was peremptorily refused them. Charles showed more anger at the attack upon Coligny than they themselves. "It is *I* who am wounded!" he exclaimed. "It is the whole of France," said Catherine, who was sitting by. Again her dramatic power helped her. "*They*," she added, "will soon come and attack the King in his own bed." About the King's anxiety, there was no pretence. He gave orders that the measures should be taken which most conduced to Coligny's safety, and which, had he desired the Admiral's death, would never have helped to hide his guilt, or tended to self-preservation—commanding that strict investigation of the business should be made; that the citizens should be forbidden to arm; that the Catholics living near Coligny should be dislodged and the Huguenots concentrated round him. He did wisely. Accusations of the Guises and Anjou were being muttered in the streets. "If prompt and ample justice were not done," said the Huguenots, "they would certainly do it themselves." All that day little bands

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of them were seen prowling round the walls of the Louvre; and inside the palace the same threat was heard. At the King's dinner, too, upon something that, doubtless, Charles had said, a friend of Coligny's offered then and there to go forth and despatch the Duc de Guise. The proposal was rejected, but the Guises were none the less in danger.

The Maréchal de Cossé, Damville, Villars, were Coligny's last visitors that morning. He spoke to them about his end, which he knew could not be far off. "I have no fear of death," he said, "but I greatly wish to see the King before I die. For I have certain things to tell him, which concern his person and his State." Damville suggested that he should bring Charles word of this desire, and Téligny proffering his company, the two set out for the Louvre. The King at once acceded, and, at two in the afternoon, he started for the Rue Béthisy, unfortunately not alone.

Catherine was too prudent to allow that, and she, with his two brothers, accompanied him. Montpensier, Retz, Nevers, Tavannes, all Coligny's bitter foes, followed at a proper distance. In the ante-room of the Admiral's chamber and in the *salle-basse* which adjoined it, the royal party found about two hundred Protestants, who did not receive them over courteously. The King passed through them to the Admiral. Going close up to his bed, "*Mon père*," he said, and those around bore witness to the real love in the tone of his voice, "*you* have the wound, but I have the perpetual pain." Then with a round oath, "I renounce my salvation," he went on, "if I do not take so horrible a vengeance that the remembrance of it shall never fade." Catherine now advanced and added her protestations to his. The Admiral turned to the King. "My only regret," he said, "is that my wound should deprive me of the happiness of working for your Majesty. Others have wished to pass me off as a rebel, a disturber of the peace. Sire, the God before whose seat I shall very shortly stand will be my judge and my witness that all my life long I have been your Majesty's impassioned servant. God will decide between my enemies and me. My constant fidelity to your father makes me feel it my bounden duty to implore you, with all the urgency I have, not to lose the present opportunity from which France may reap great advantage. The war in Flanders can no longer be discussed—it is begun. Do not disown it; it means the peace of your kingdom. If you stay your hand

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now, you will most clearly expose your realm to danger. Purge your Council, Sire !”

The Admiral became more and more excited. Charles tried to soothe him. “You are agitating yourself too much,” he said. But Coligny would not be checked—he knew it was his last chance. “Is it not a disgrace, Sire,” he went on, “that your promise of pacification should be basely violated every day ?” “We will set that right, *Monsieur l’Amiral*,” rejoined the King; “and I have just sent Commissioners into all the provinces for this very purpose. Here is my mother, who can give you assurance on this point.” Catherine, by the side of her son, was standing near Coligny’s bed. “It is true, *Monsieur l’Amiral*, and you know it,” she said. “Yes, in good sooth do I know it, Madam,” he answered with still increasing heat—“Commissioners have been sent to the provinces, and among them are some who have condemned me to be hanged and offered fifty thousand crowns to the man who should bring you my head.” “Then we will send others, *Monsieur l’Amiral*, who will not be open to suspicion, and albeit I am no more than a woman, I am of opinion that this should at once be seen to.” This was Catherine’s conclusion, but Charles, who feared that the talk might really harm the sick man, tried to distract his attention. With a manner which was markedly tender he asked to see the bullet that had wounded him. Catherine took it in her hand and weighed it. “I am very glad,” she observed lightly, “that the bullet was not left inside you, for I remember that when Monsieur de Guise was murdered near Orleans, the doctors told me more than once that if the bullet had been got out of him, even although it was poisoned, there would have been no danger of his death.”

Was it her disappointment at the failure of the shot, or was it the impotence of her foe, that made Catherine almost betray what she was feeling ? And did the King hear her ? It is more probable that he was absorbed in the Admiral’s torn coat-sleeve, which he had also begged to look at. The sight of the blood-stains stirred him strangely, and he stared at them with fixed eyes. He was thoroughly unhinged. “What ! is that then the blood of the famous Admiral ?” he kept muttering below his breath. Presently he entreated Coligny to come and lodge near him in the Louvre—he should have the apartments of Charles’s sister, the Duchesse de Lorraine—he would himself have him moved there. The Admiral refused and would not allow himself to be persuaded. But his Majesty was

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untiring in his care. If the Admiral would not come to the palace, the King would take other precautions. He set forth his plan of that morning ; he would see that lodgings round about Coligny were found for his followers, so that he might be encircled by his friends.

Charles rose to take his leave, but Coligny was still dissatisfied. He asked to speak with him apart. The rest, led by Catherine, withdrew and stood in the middle of the room. He was left alone with the Admiral. The wounded man spoke in whispers. He bade him to reign by himself and always to distrust his mother. At this point Catherine interrupted them. The Admiral had talked enough, she said ; so much excitement would be bad for him. The King took a last farewell of the man who had been his good genius. His evil genius drove him away.

She had not deceived Coligny ; in spite of the King's good faith, he knew what the Louvre would mean. After they had gone, "The man," he said, "would be a fool, who would let himself thus be taken and trapped within four walls." But his over-sanguine followers thought him safe. The Vidame de Chartres and Têligny showed themselves unexpectedly confident. When ominous reports reached their ears—"These rumour-mongers must be silenced with sword-thrusts," was all they said. Perhaps they trusted over much to their friends outside. The Huguenots had acquired new force from their anger at the outrage done them. They were on the watch ; they had grown truculent, and every hour lent them fresh audacity. After the discovery about the gun, they even dared to accuse Anjou aloud ; and, passing from their menace of the morning to more active demonstration, they surrounded the Hôtel of Guise and that of his brother, Aumale, with bands of armed men who threatened to attack them. The Guises, for once thoroughly alarmed, called on the King to take up their quarrel.

The return of the royal party was no smooth one. No sooner were they on the road than Catherine began tormenting her son with questions. Charles struggled in vain, like a bird in the snare ; word by word she tore the Admiral's speech from him. Unstrung though he was, he held out till they reached the Louvre. Then his nerves broke down. "*Eh bien, mort Dieu !*" he cried, "since you *will* know, this is what the Admiral said to me—that all power had gone to pieces in your hands, and that evil for me would come of it." With this out-

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burst the King went away, and shut himself into his room. He was in a state of frenzy bordering on insanity. Already distraught by grief and fear, the inquisition to which he had been subjected had added a last touch. "We saw very clearly," said Anjou, "that from this moment we must not waste more time in getting rid of the Admiral." "The King once in his chamber," he continued, "we withdrew to the room of the Queen-Mother, who was piqued and offended beyond words. And for that she could not, at that instant, resolve upon anything that helped, we put off the decision till next day. At which time I went to find my mother, who was already up. I had, as it were, a heavy hammer in my head, and she likewise; and we, for the nonce, determined nothing, excepting by some means or other to despatch the Admiral." Catherine had been wont to boast that "the Admiral and his heretics had no more power than the King," so a Spanish envoy told Philip; now when she found out that she had underrated their strength, she was penetrated with dread of what they might do; death alone, it seemed, would silence them, and death, at least, was a weapon within her compass.

The King's doings did not diminish her fears. He was pursuing an independent course. His first step was to organize the inquiry into the attempt upon the Admiral; and he appointed for this purpose a Commission, with the *Politique*, de Thou, as its first President, and the Admiral's friend, Cavaignes, as his helper. Nor did Charles stop here. He had several of the Guises' servants arrested and went so far as to menace Henri de Guise, a fact which alarmed the Duke. On Saturday morning he and his brother Aumale came to Charles and begged his permission to leave Paris for a short while. "Go where you like," the King answered roughly, and, as they withdrew from his presence, "I shall know well enough," he said, "where to find them—if they are guilty." The crafty Guises rode on their way towards the Porte Saint-Antoine, but there, unseen by any, they turned back and went home. Their request for leave of absence was but a stratagem to make the Huguenots believe them out of reach, while they lay in hiding inside their own houses. Meanwhile the King, whom they had hoodwinked, was much pre-occupied with the impression that the late events would make on foreign countries. He sent word to all the Ambassadors abroad of the attempt upon the Admiral. "Tell the Queen of England," he wrote to La Mothe-Fénélon, "that I am deter-

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mined to do such awful justice that every soul in my realm will thereby take example ; and, added thereto, to compel the observance of my Edict of Pacification. I do not wish to keep from you that this evil deed proceeds from the enmity between the House of Châtillon and the House of Guise. But I shall so promptly order affairs that they shall involve none of my subjects in their quarrels."

It was thus that matters went within the Louvre. Outside it, they were not more reassuring. The Huguenots, in hopes of some enterprise against the Guises, were in dangerously high spirits. They grew over-confident, and one of them, Pardellan, who sought admission to the King's *Coucher*, was fool enough to start a brawl with one of the King's Guards who refused to allow him right of entry. Pardellan's Huguenot friends crowded into the Tuileries Gardens and insolently demanded that justice should be done him—a folly as regarded their cause and one which imperilled the Admiral. Téligny, now at last alive to the danger, was sent to beg the King for a guard to watch Coligny's lodging. It was Anjou who responded. He despatched fifty arquebusiers with Cosseins at their head—Cosseins, who was publicly known to be a bitter enemy of the Admiral's. The Huguenots were impotent against this move ; their only course was to keep on the alert. Outside foes were not their only ones—they were conscious of perils nearer home. Navarre and Condé were both too closely bound up with royalty to inspire them with confidence, and they mistrusted them enough to make them sign a pledge that they would avenge the evil done to Coligny.

It was upon all these doings (on August 22-23) that rumour took a definite form. Word reached the Queen-Mother that an organized conspiracy of the Huguenots was to be carried through in a few days' time : that on August 26 (some say the 30th) she, the King and all the royal family were to be attacked and done away with. The report was almost certainly as false as such reports are apt to be—based upon exaggeration of the violent threats of the Protestants. They were evidently meditating revenge on the Guises, but it is most improbable that they were planning any larger and more formal scheme.¹ Walsingham, a clear-eyed witness, did not credit its existence. No more

¹ The notion of a conspiracy headed by Coligny has been definitely rejected by modern historians as absurd, and need not be gone into here.

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did such inveterate foes of theirs as Monluc, the younger Tavannes, and the Nuncio. "The Queen," wrote Monluc, after the massacre, "had informed me, it is true, that a great plot had been discovered against the King and his State, and that that had been the cause of all that happened. I know well enough what *I* believed about it." Catherine, however, not unnaturally, implicitly trusted what she heard. She lost her head. Where could she look for help? Charles, with his zeal against the Guises, his determination to discover the delinquent, appeared to her to be conniving at his own assassination. To get justice done to the Admiral had become a fixed idea in his brain. She must save him—she must save them all. There was no time to lose : whatever was to be done must be done at once.

Catherine called a Council of murder. To avoid suspicion, she bade its members meet her in the gardens of the Tuileries—a sinister party to assemble *al fresco* in the long green alleys which gave shade from the burning August sun. One by one they came : the arrogant Nevers (Louis of Gonzaga), the other great Italians, Catherine's creatures, Retz (Gondi) and Birago ; two Florentines, Caviana and Petrucci, and Catherine and Anjou. They were discussing the death of the Admiral and the best method of achieving it, when their dastardly agent, Bouchavannes, who had played the spy in the Admiral's lodgings, was introduced into their presence. He repeated every word he had heard there and the Florentines heightened the effect by recounting details of the Huguenots' alleged conspiracy. No general massacre was mooted, but Catherine and her confederates knew well that the murder of Coligny meant a war between his followers and the Guises—between Huguenots and Catholics—which must end in a general slaughter of the Protestant minority. But between debate and fulfilment there was an obstacle. All came to the same conclusion—that nothing could be done without the King. To some this seemed a counsel of despair. Charles was at this moment inaccessible as he had never been before—possessed by the one desire for vengeance against Coligny's enemies. There had been no time when his sentiment for the Admiral had exercised a stronger sway over him.

Catherine knew her son better than the rest. If she could not maintain her influence, she could at any rate acquire it for the moment by the physical power she had over him. But she was too prudent to see him at once ; she knew that he was angry

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with her, and so suspicious of her suggestions that he would probably reject them. She also knew that his feeling for the Admiral had one rival in his heart—a feeling of fear—the terror, not of open danger, but of sudden assassination. While Anjou went out into the streets to watch the state of things for himself, she sent the crafty Retz to Charles, to talk of what the Protestants were plotting and to fill his mind with alarm. When Retz left him, the King, already upon the brink of insanity, was in an abject state of apprehension. Upon this condition Catherine understood how to work.

After a private confabulation with Retz, she went to Charles in his apartment. For more than an hour she lashed his nerves and did her utmost to torment him into one of those states of fury in which, as she knew, he always said what she willed. How she achieved her object we cannot know ; but, doubtless, she played on his sensitive vision with the image of violent death. Then, having brought him to the pitch that she desired, she called a meeting to assemble in his Privy Closet. It consisted of her previous advisers, with several others added, the Maréchal de Tavannes and Morvilliers among them. She continued her process of terrifying Charles with further pictures of impending danger ; she dwelled upon the opportunity now given him of settling with the rebels once for all. The wedding had put them into his hand—"they were caged inside the walls of Paris ; at last he had the chance of wiping out the shame of the treaties that they had imposed." The King, unhinged though he was, remained silent and impenetrable. Still more so when she urged the Admiral's treachery in promoting a war in Flanders and ruining the poor stricken kingdom. Did he remember, she cried, the murder of Charry and of François de Guise ? The Admiral's death would surely be but a just expiation ; and it would only be needful to kill him and two or three Protestant leaders to save a multitude. Then, as he still remained impassive, she once more threatened to retire from the kingdom, to leave him without her support. Charles broke in upon her flow of eloquence ; he could not, he said, break his faith, or belie his friendship. He had but one clear notion in his head—that he did not wish the Admiral to be touched. The Admiral, she reiterated, was a traitor ; the men Charles thought his friends were his worst foes ; and she reminded him of the flight from Meaux, the Protestants' pursuit—a memory which he never could endure and which did not fail to exasperate him now. And Catherine followed up

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her advantage. He was endangering his life and that of his brothers. If he did not act promptly, "the next hour might sound his knell." Nevertheless, he did not yield. "He could not," wrote Marguerite, "in any fashion share their view, for that he greatly loved the Admiral. . . . And by that which I after heard him say himself, they had much trouble in making him consent; and had they not forced him to believe that his life and his realm were at stake, he could not possibly have done such a thing. As for my mother, she had never found herself checkmated until now when she endeavoured to make the King see that all this was for the good of the State."

He still wavered, but fatigue was telling upon him; he was almost at an end of his strength. Turning away from his mother, he asked the other Councillors for their opinion. They would only endorse hers. The Huguenots were assuredly conspiring, they asserted; the danger to himself was imminent. Then his nerves finally gave way; his flickering reason yielded. The fit of frenzy his mother had made for came duly. "*Par la mort Dieu*," he shouted, "since you choose to kill the Admiral, I consent! But then you must also kill all the Huguenots in France, so that not one shall be left to reproach me after it is done." With a violent movement, he wheeled round upon Catherine: "You have willed it—well, then, kill them all, kill them all!" he cried. The foam was upon his lips—he was practically out of his mind. Uttering blasphemy, he went away from the room; "and going out furiously," says Anjou, "he left us behind in his closet, where we held debate for the rest of the day and for a good part of the night." The King was now a fanatic for their cause. "If till this hour it had been hard to persuade him, our difficulty now was to restrain him," wrote his brother.

It was long before the confederates became unanimous. Should the Huguenots all be killed? was the first question. It had ere this, doubtless, simmered in their minds, but now they could urge the King's command as a solution. This solution—a general massacre—was their great desire, and agreement on this point was no difficulty. Morvilliers alone tried to modify the project a little, but his feeble objections were overborne, and he was swept into the current. There followed the more complicated matter of the course to be pursued with regard to Navarre and Condé, the Huguenot Princes of the Blood. Tavannes says that they owed their lives

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to his father's intercession, but the truth seems to be that it was Nevers whose pleading saved his brother-in-law, Condé, while Catherine herself refused to allow the death of Navarre. The destruction of the Bourbons would mean the power of the Guises—she must protect herself. The execution of the heretical Montmorencys was also discussed ; but the Maréchal, the head of the family, was away at Chantilly, and since to despatch its younger members would be to convert the elder brother into a vengeful leader of the rebels, their safety was prudently conceded. In after days Catherine used to say that she had only the lives of five or six Huguenots upon her conscience. By that time, perhaps, she believed it, but the fate of these great nobles once resolved on, she had not the least hesitation in entering upon a detailed debate as to the distribution of the slaughter—the allotment of districts to certain chiefs. To the Guises fell the murder of the Admiral and the *noblesse* of St. Germain l'Auxerrois ; Montpensier was charged with the destruction of the suite of the Prince de Condé. And beyond what was voiced aloud, each man had his secret projects. Part of the horror of this assembly was its mystery—the mutual distrust of its members—the darkness in which each man groped after his neighbour's meaning. "For this one," a contemporary wrote, "did not know what that one was after." Without, all was organized, deliberate ; within, all was panic-stricken confusion.

The King had sunk into silence, fiercer than the talk of the councillors. It seems as if his mother had by now transferred her own idea to his subjugated brain. As in the case of many other madmen, his head was especially lucid, and even inventive, on certain points. Marcel, the *ex-Prévôt des Marchands*, "who had the people of Paris in his hand," was bidden to come to the palace. "How many men can you count upon ?" asked Charles. "That, your Majesty, depends on the time given me." "Well, then, in a month ?" "A hundred thousand and more, if you wish it." "And in a week ?" "A due proportion of that number." "And in a day ?" "I can answer for twenty thousand, at the least." He was solemnly sworn to secrecy. When he left the King, he had his orders. The next night, in every house there should be found an armed man with a torch and a white scarf tied round his left arm ; at every window another torch should burn ; the bell of the Palais de Justice should give the signal—and after that, they would know what to do. Marcel departed, to be followed by

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the reigning Prévôt, Le Charron. To him also the King confided the terrors with which they were surrounded—the imminence of the Huguenot conspiracy—the danger that beset royalty. And he likewise had his instructions. He was to take possession of the keys of the city-gates, so that “none might either enter or go forth”; he was to withdraw every boat from the Seine, to arm the burgher militia; to bring together all the town-artillery in front of the Hôtel de Ville, that it might at once be moved to the place where it would be needed. What that place was, the King would not say; Le Charron should hear from him later. But Le Charron had some remnant of a conscience, and it was only upon the threat of death that the King at last forced his promise of obedience. Even so, he gave no orders till next morning, when the affair was in full swing.

Demented as the King was, there were moments in these two days when the curtain lifted—clear intervals when his mind misgave him and he went back upon his decision. It was probably on one of these occasions that his *Gouverneur*, Retz, was sent to him. “He came,” says the Princess, “to seek the King in his closet about nine or ten that night, and he told him that the injury to the Admiral did not proceed from Monsieur de Guise alone, but that my brother and my mother had been of the plot; that her design had been only to remove this pest, the Admiral, from the kingdom; but that the man employed having missed his aim, the Huguenots were filled with despair and had accused the Guises, the Queen-Mother and the Duc d’Anjou. They believed that the King also had consented to the attempt and had resolved to take arms that very night. Thus His Majesty stood in very great danger—whether from the Catholics or the Huguenots.” Retz did not fail in his purpose. Charles once more grew frantic with alarm and with haste to forestall his enemies. And he was only too ready to believe the assertion Retz made, that he need have no anxiety: the measures would merely be regarded as a private vendetta of the Guises. Charles lulled his lurking scruples to rest by inviting thirty or forty Huguenot nobles to spend the night—the night of August 23—at the Louvre.

There were others, too, to whom he gave shelter. “He sent,” Brantôme tells us, “to fetch Master Ambroise Paré, his First Surgeon and the first in Christendom, and he made him come that same night to his Garde-Robe and ordered him not to stir thence. ‘For,’ quoth he, ‘it would not be reasonable

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that one who could be of service to a whole little world should be thus butchered.' And so he did not press him to change his religion, any more than he persuaded his old Nurse, the which he loved so dearly that he never could refuse her aught. (But albeit he put no constraint upon her, he begged her to return to the Catholic faith." That was the utmost he could do. The die was cast—destiny was too strong for him.

The hour of the Queen-Mother's *Coucher* had come. Her bedchamber was full of her fellow-conspirators, who stood in knots, whispering together. The bride, Princess Marguerite, was the only person present who knew nothing. "I was sitting," she says, "on a coffer beside my sister of Lorraine, who seemed to me exceedingly sad, when my mother, who was talking to several people, suddenly noticed I was there and told me to go to bed. As I made my curtesy to her, my sister seized my arm and, stopping me, burst into tears. '*Mon Dieu*, my sister, do not go!' she said—which terrified me greatly. The Queen perceived this, and calling my sister to her, forbade her to say anything to me. My sister replied that it looked ill to send me off thus to be sacrificed, and that, doubtless, if *they* discovered anything, they would wreak their vengeance upon me. My mother rejoined that, if it so pleased God, I should not suffer any hurt; but, however that might be, it was needful that I should go, for fear of making *them* suspect something which would hinder the deed. After this I could see they were disputing, but I could not catch what they said. Again my mother roughly commanded me to go to bed. My sister, with another burst of tears, bade me good-night, without daring to say a single word more; and as for me, I found myself lost, transfixed, unable in the least to imagine what it was I had to dread. As soon as I was in my own closet I began to pray that God would take me into His protection and would preserve me—from whom and what I knew not. Whereupon my husband, who was got already into bed, bade me also to do the same; the which I did, and found his bed surrounded by thirty or forty Huguenots whom as yet I did not know, for it was but a few days since I was married. The whole night through, they did nothing but talk of the accident which had befallen Monsieur l'Amiral; and they resolved that when the day broke they would go to the King and beg for vengeance upon Monsieur de Guise, and that if it were not granted them, they themselves would take

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it upon them to fulfil it. But I had the tears of my sister continually in my heart, and I could not sleep for the fears she had raised within me."

Hardly had Margot left her mother's room than the last orders were issued. The Duc de Guise was summoned and bidden go with the Chevalier d'Angoulême (Henri II's illegitimate son) [and, at the appointed hour, see the Admiral despatched ; while to each of the conspirators a special Huguenot was assigned as his private prey. This business concluded, it was time for the *Coucher* of the King, and to this function the whole company repaired. "For the last time Catholics and Protestants elbowed one another in the same room, the murderers mingling with the victims." There was one among the Protestant nobles who was very dear to the King—his familiar friend, the Duc de la Rochefoucauld. When he came to bid him good-night, Charles was overcome by compassion. "Do not go, Foucauld," he said, "stay here and sleep with my *valets de chambre*." But the unwitting Foucauld went home.

And, after he departed, the courtiers, one by one, dropped off. "The King's bed-curtains were drawn. There was silence awhile in the Louvre."

CHAPTER IX
St. Bartholomew's Eve

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"**H**ERE, *Monsieur Tel*, is the true history of the St. Bartholomew, which has this night troubled my understanding"—these are the words with which the Duc d'Anjou closed his mysterious "Confession," written but a few years later. "When we had reposed but two hours," he says, "just when the day began to break, the King, my mother and I went into the wing of the Louvre adjoining the tennis-court and entered a room which gives upon the *basse-cour*, from which we could watch the opening of the business." Catherine had been astir before. Did she expect Charles to fail her at the last, and was it this anxiety that impelled her? She had gone into his room and found him there, standing ready dressed. Soon after, when the trio were together, he had the return upon himself which she had dreaded. "Is it not better," cried his mother, "to tear these rotten limbs asunder, than to rend the Church, the Bride of our Lord?" And then, in exalted strain, she quoted an Italian Bishop's sermon—" *Che pietà lor ser crudele? Che crudele lor ser pietoso?* " This was, we know, a family adage, often on the lips of the King. Perhaps the well-known words affected him now. But he made, it is said, a last attempt to wrest himself from the two evil spirits who hemmed him in. It was in vain: their clutch was too tight.

Some think that it was her fears for his stability that made her suddenly change her orders. The signal for the massacre was to be given an hour before daybreak by the bell of the Palais de Justice; she sent word that this was not to be; that the tocsin of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois—the church opposite the Louvre—should sound the fatal call at once. D'Aubigné even says that in her nervous haste she had the clock of Saint-Germain put on by an hour and a half in advance of that of the Palais de Justice. All three were in a state of indescribable

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panic. Their dread of the Huguenots' conspiracy had grown as the hours brought it nearer, and Catherine was certainly possessed by belief that they might take action sooner—that at any moment the Louvre might be attacked, and some dire fate, she knew not what, might overtake her. She, who moved in the darkness herself, was in terror of confronting the unknown. Every word and gesture of hers recorded at this moment is stamped with the seal of fear, and Anjou was not far behind her.

"As we were considering," he wrote, "the consequences of so great an enterprise, *to which, to say the truth, we had till then hardly given real reflection,*¹ of a sudden we heard the report of a pistol, but I could not say from what direction it came, or if any man were injured thereby. All that I know is this—that the mere sound so wounded us all three and entered so deep into our spirits that it did a hurt both to our senses and our reason. We returned to our first counsels and forthwith allowed the enterprise to take its course."

Could any eloquence more vividly convey the image of these three guilty creatures cowering at the window, starting at the first sound they heard, feeling it turn against themselves? So much afraid were they that, at this eleventh hour, they sent to stop the murder of the Admiral. The answer Guise returned was "Too late!"

In the streets outside all was confusion. The bells of Paris clashed and clanged; the guns roared; and the shouts of the mob mingled with the cries of the victims. For the butchery had begun. "Every one was astir, every one was excited, every one was rushing hither and thither, crossing and recrossing his fellow, seeking a vent for his rage." So records one who must have witnessed the scene. As soon as the massacre began, Catherine and Anjou recovered self-possession and, according to the Papal Nuncio, went on giving clear and detailed directions.

What was happening in the Admiral's lodging? Téligny and Querchy had been with him till midnight, when they left him in the care of Ambroise Paré and of a faithful old servant, Nicolas Muss. Paré, we know, went away from him later, at the King's command. All seemed calm as the night wore away. Suddenly, between two and three, the stillness was broken by the tocsin of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois and, almost

¹ The italics are the author's.

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straight upon it, by the sound of horses' hoofs in the street. The Huguenots near by, disturbed in their sleep by the sound, got up to inquire the cause and were told that a tourney was preparing. The hoofs belonged to the horses of the Duc de Guise—he was riding to the Rue Béthisy. In a moment he had stopped before the Admiral's door and, without dismounting, spoke a few words to the waiting Cosseins. A man named Labonne had the keys of the Hôtel, and to him Cosseins repaired. The King, he said, had sent an urgent message to Coligny—his deputy must be at once admitted. Labonne unsuspectingly complied and, as he opened the outer house-door, he fell, stabbed through, to the ground. The murderers rushed into the courtyard and killed one of Navarre's Suisses, while the other four fled into the house and barricaded the inner door. The noise of shots, of scuffling footsteps, told Coligny that his hour had come. He arose and dressed himself in his *robe-de-chambre*. "*Monsieur Merlin, faites moi la prière,*" he said to the Pastor, at that moment in his room. As Merlin prayed, the Huguenot, Cornaton, ran in, breathless. "They are knocking down the inner door," he cried—"Monseigneur, it is God who calls us!" "For this long while I have been prepared for death," answered Coligny in a quiet voice. "You, my friends, if you still can, save yourselves. You will not be able to save me. I do not wish those who hold you dear to be able to reproach me with your death. I commend my soul to God's mercy." "And God summons you unto Himself," rejoined one near him. Cornaton and Merlin began by resisting his commands, but in the end they yielded. They had not a moment to lose; through the window they clambered on to the roof, but the men below sighted them. Cornaton was shot down at once. Merlin crawled onward by himself. Nicolas Muss, the old servant, who alone had refused to go, remained with his master, Coligny. The door below crashed inwards, there was the sound of tramping on the stairs. Then there were cries. The loyal Suisses on guard were falling one by one on the staircase. The bedroom door was easily forced, and the ruffian, Bême, and Cosseins entered the Admiral's chamber together. Behind them came a band of *bravi*—Tosinghi, Petrucci, Sarlabous, Attin, with three traitors of the King's Suisses, dressed in their black, white and green. The Duc de Guise was waiting in the courtyard. His agents found Coligny upon his knees, leaning forward, pressed against the bed.

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For one instant the power of goodness told. At the sight of the dignified figure, the white hair, the serene countenance, the assassins hesitated. It was but for a breathing space. "Are you the Admiral?" asked Bême. "Yes, young man," he replied—"you should have pity on my age" (he was but fifty-three)—"but do what you will. *You* have no power to shorten my life." For all answer, Bême ran him through with a sword.¹ He fell, and the whole troop took their turn in assailing him, so that many of them boasted they had killed him. Tosinghi seized the gold chain from the murdered man's neck and put it round his own. "Bême, have you finished?" called out Guise from below. "It is done," responded Bême from the window. "Well, then, throw him down here, so that we may see for ourselves." Helped by Sarlabous, Bême lifted the heavy body and flung it down through the window. "The Admiral was still breathing; his hand made one more convulsive effort to cling to the window-sill"—then all was over. As he lay upon the pavement of the courtyard, the Chevalier d'Angoulême, who had dismounted from his horse, took his handkerchief to wipe the blood which concealed Coligny's face. "Yes, it is very much he," he said, and then he kicked him. Guise stood by, silent, gazing upon his foe. Not for long. Petrucci cut off the noble head to carry to the Louvre, and the body was given over to the mercies of the populace. Marcel's armed bands, the scum of the city, dragged it through the streets with savage outrage, calling to those who passed to share the triumph. When they were tired, they brought it to the gibbet of Montfaucon—the common town gallows—and left it to hang there and decay. And thus, says a modern historian, Coligny's own words were fulfilled. "I would rather," he had said, "be dragged through the mud of Paris, than see civil war again in the land." His head met a fate that he could not have foretold: it was taken in solemn state to Rome.

In the meantime, his assassins rode off in quest of fresh prey. "Now for the others!" cried Angoulême, mounting his horse. Guise, Aumale, Nevers, Montpensier, Tavannes, joined him, beside two other men, better known in after days, Monsieur du Guast, and Coconnas. Through the streets

¹ Mr. Whitehead, in his "Coligny," states that a Swiss, Koch, gave the first blow, Bême the second. But as he does not give his reasons for doing so, we prefer to adopt the more familiar version of the event.

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and squares they went, crying, "Kill, kill! The King commands it." The Huguenots, they told the people, attacked their sovereign in his palace. Anjou's men and those of Montpensier had the palm for cruelty. The Seine was thick with corpses; the very children played at games with dead bodies. "Death and bloodshed ran the streets together"—the words are those of Tavannes, and he knew.

The general computation of the dead in Paris has hitherto been from 8,000 to 5,000; Lord Acton reduced it to rather over 2,000, but the latest researches go to prove that he has understated the fact. And the cruelty cannot be reduced. Blood once spilt, Paris "saw red," and when Paris sees red it goes mad, whether in 1572, or in 1794. But besides this, besides the flare of party-hatred, the massacre had to count with other motives. Commercial jealousy heightened bitter feeling, for there was great depression in trade, and such merchants as were prosperous were sober Huguenots—the nucleus of a rising trading-class. But more than this, every private grudge, every lawsuit and money-quarrel, every feud of love or hatred, took advantage of the vile occasion, killed its prey, gained the prize that it desired. Among such victims was the great scholar, Ramus. A Humanist, a world-famed Greek teacher at the University of Paris, leading the unpretentious life of a recluse, he was dragged from his house, and butchered by the orders of an envious pedagogue who had wanted his professorial Chair. And so dreadful was the treatment of his dead body that Lambin, the Reader to the King, a bigot who thought Ramus a heretic, died of horror at the sight of what was done.

The annals of slaughter do not make profitable literature, and their sickening details are best left unread. But some figures stand out pathetically from the mass. La Rochefoucauld was one of the first to die. When the masked murderers came to his house, led by the brother of Chicot, he thought that it was the King in disguise—that His Majesty had arrived to play his favourite midnight game of *Fouetter*. For Charles was in the habit, as we know, of rising in the small hours and running into his friends' houses to thrash them in their beds. "Foucauld" raised himself on his pillow. "This is the old game played by your father before you; you won't take me in," he said, laughing—"besides, I have got my clothes on." They approached him. "Do not hurt me!" he cried out gaily. Without a word, they stabbed him through the

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body. Téligny, too, one of the noblest of the Huguenots, was shot down as he fled along the roofs ; while Goudimel, the Court musician, perished cruelly. " The paper would weep," says an old chronicler, " if we wrote all that happened upon it."

Inside the Louvre there was chaos. The King, intoxicated with the sight of blood, was almost raving. He had lost every remnant of a scruple. Followers of Condé and Navarre were invited to the Louvre and summoned, as usual when on service, to attend the official roll-call. As they came down to the courtyard, they were mown down, one by one. Charles had been dragged to the window to look at them, probably to show that he was responsible for the massacre ; and, as they died, they lifted their eyes to him, invoked his promises, implored him to save them. He met their entreaties with a wild stare and stood watching their last sufferings. The Mantuan envoy who had hastened to the palace sent a letter that same day to his master. " I saw," he wrote, " in front of the Louvre, more than twelve of the Protestant chiefs either dying or on the point of death." Ill-starred were those who that day trusted in Princes. At the outset of proceedings, the Protestants of the Faubourg Saint-Germain thought the whole affair a machination of the Guises and never doubted that the King would give to *them* the protection he had pledged himself to grant. Resolving to claim it directly, they took boat to a place near the Louvre, whence, to their surprise, they saw the Guards and a row of boats drawn up on the other bank. Dismayed by this semblance of war, they fled down the river ; but the King had espied them from his window and he fired at them as they went. To see the corpses float upon the water was a dreadful joy to him. " Have I not played my game cleverly ? " he exclaimed. " Have I not learnt my lesson well, in the Latin of my forefather, King Louis XI ? "

Catherine, now collected and secure, had gathered her ladies about her. Her distractions were worse than her wickedness. As her enemies were brought in, one after the other, she and her dressed-out Squadron examined the dead disfigured Huguenots, made remarks upon their looks and their figures, drew airy comparisons between them. Grand ladies planned the death of certain people—" of all sorts and conditions "—whose disappearance they happened to desire. The very reading of their doings is like an intimation of mortal disease.

¹ Comte de la Ferrière, Historical Introductions to *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*.

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It has been pointed out¹ that the only two women who showed compunction were Elizabeth of Austria and Marguerite—the *dévôte* Queen and the Humanist Princess. The poor young Queen, who moved sadly like a ghost among the Court, speaking little and that in Spanish, was expecting to become a mother. She had “gone to bed at her wonted hour.” Nor did she wake until the morning, when they told her of the fine mystery now being played. “Alack!” on a sudden quoth she, “does my husband know of this thing?” “Yes, Madam,” answered some one—“it is he himself who has done it.” “Oh, my God!” she cried, “what is this? And what sort of counsellors can they be who have given him such advice? My God, I entreat, I demand, of Thee that Thou wilt mercifully forgive him; for if *Thou* hast not pity upon him, I fear greatly that this sin will be pardoned by none else.” And forthwith she asked for her “*Heures*,” and prayed to God with tears in her eyes.

Her sister-in-law's night had not been as calm as hers. Those opening hours of apprehension went on till daybreak. “In this fashion passed the night, without my closing my eyes,” she wrote. “With the dawn my husband said that he wished to go and play at tennis till the King should be awake, for he had suddenly resolved to ask justice of His Majesty. He went from my room, and with him all his gentlemen besides. And I, seeing that it was day and deeming that the danger of which my sister had spoken was past, overcome also by sleep, I, then, told my Nurse to shut the door so that I might rest at my ease.”

“An hour later, when I was fast asleep, there cometh a man who knocketh at the door with feet and hands, crying, ‘Navarre! Navarre!’ My Nurse, thinking that it was my husband, runneth quickly to the door and opens it. There appeareth a gentleman, one M. de Léran, who had received a sword-thrust in his elbow and a blow from a halberd in his arm, and was still being pursued by four Archers, who all followed him into my chamber. He, wishing to save himself, threw himself upon my bed, and I, feeling his arms upon me, threw myself into the *ruelle*, but he threw himself after me, still holding me round the waist. I had no notion who the man was, or whether he came to insult me, or whether the Archers had a grudge against me or against him. We both screamed aloud, the one as much affrighted as the other. At last, as God willed, Monsieur de Nançay, Captain of the Guards, arrived upon the

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scene—and, finding me in such a plight, could not, despite his compassion, help bursting into a fit of laughter. Furious at the indiscretion of the Archers, he sent them off, and granted me the life of the poor man who still clutched me. And I had him put to bed and bandaged in my Privy Closet, ordering that he should stay there until he was entirely recovered. After which, when I had changed my nightgown, which Monsieur de Lérans had covered with blood, M. de Nançay told me what was happening, and assured me that my husband was in the King's apartment and that he would suffer no hurt. Then, throwing a cloak over my shoulders, he took me away to the room of my sister of Lorraine, which I reached more dead than alive. As I entered the ante-chamber, the doors of which were wide open, a gentleman named Bourse, who was fleeing from the Archers that pursued him, was pierced through by a thrust from a halberd, only three paces from me. I fell, on the other side, half-fainting into Monsieur de Nançay's arms, and I thought that the thrust had stabbed both of us also. When I had a little revived, I entered the small bedroom where my sister slept. And while I was there, Monsieur de Moissans, the First Gentleman of my husband, and Armagnac his First Valet-de-chambre, sought me out to implore me to save their lives. I went straight to the Queen-Mother and begged *them* to hear my prayer—which at the last they granted."

The Captain of the Guards was right—Navarre was safe in the King's apartment. And very soon after the massacre began, Charles had sent for him and Condé to his presence. "Brother and Cousin," said he, "do not be frightened or afflicted by what you will hear. If I have summoned you hither, it is for your own safety." Later on, as if some old memory had stung him, his bearing towards them changed. He grew malignant. "All," he told them, "was done by his command." "I wish for one religion only in my kingdom"—he said angrily. "Choose now—the Mass or death!" Condé resisted; he would be "faithful to his creed were he to die for it," he answered. Navarre dallied suavely, as his father might have done, in the very way that broke his mother's heart; he asked the King not to tamper with his conscience, but he did not define what his conscience involved. The Mantuan envoy describes how Condé, who did not wish to humiliate himself, dared say "that there were five hundred gentlemen ready to avenge this lamentable massacre." The King, in a rage, threatened him with his dagger, and, turning to the King of Navarre, "As for

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you," he said, "only show good faith and I will show you good cheer." Navarre was not strong enough to hold out; for the moment he was practically a renegade. Condé's firmness meant real heroism. Charles allowed him a period of grace, but, when that was over, he was eager to kill him himself. It was only his Queen who deterred him; for she knelt at his feet "with a countenance all distorted by tears, the which she had shed day and night since the evil time began." She may have come to him at a good moment. For Charles's fury had worn itself out; it was followed by utter prostration, by atrophy of every faculty. At noon, on August 24, Le Charron sent to beg him to stop the slaughter; both he and Catherine tried to do so in vain. It was easier to free the genii of destruction than to shut them up again.

But when the massacre was over, and his violence with it, the King, so fatally lucid throughout his madness, had no knowledge of how the slaughter had come about. The day after, August 25, when a courageous noble implied that such a deed had not been expected of His Majesty—"You are right," he rejoined, "my headpiece knew nothing about it."

His very face had changed with the experience. Demoralized and pale, he looked a wreck, and "his countenance no longer showed that gentleness that it was wont to wear." But if his sane hours brought him deepest gloom, they were by no means constant, and for some time after the massacre his fits of excitement recurred—a relief from the darkness which oppressed him. When such moods were upon him, he would still court the sight of blood and traverse Paris to watch executions. On one occasion of the sort, the hanging by night of Bricquemaut and Cavaignes, he had lighted torches held near the gibbet that he might the better see their expressions. He was present, too, at another spectacle, and, with Catherine and Navarre for companions, he witnessed from behind a curtain the burning of Coligny's effigy. His ugly example was followed by others, and the children of the town were taken to see public executions as a moral lesson that they would not forget.

It is almost impossible to estimate the number of those who were saved, because the majority of them were unknown and their escapes were not recorded. They were sometimes spared for reasons as strange as those for which they were massacred. "A few noblemen were pardoned by the King for that they passed as having no religion at all," and promised

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Majesty to become Catholics. If the atheist had advantages also had the *bon-vivant*. The Parisians have always remained the same. One man got off with his life because of the good dinners that he had given. Another was taken by his worst enemy, who rode off with him to his house in the country where the victim expected to be butchered ; instead of which, with dramatic generosity, his adversary kept him safe and afterwards sent him home unscathed. There was more of chance in the rescue of a little boy, who long lay hidden under the dead—the bodies of his father and his brother—until he heard a passer-by say something in a voice that he recognized. Then he called in a low tone, and the man stopped and, lifting him from beneath the corpses to the saddle, galloped off with him to a place of security.

Among Coligny's close friends, few were preserved. Of those with him at the time of his death only Merlin seems to have escaped. After his comrade was shot down, he crept along the high uneven roofs, concealed by their crevices and shadows, until he was too weary to go on. His infirmities stood him in good stead. Exhausted, hampered too by short sight, he dropped into a barn full of hay and lay there beneath it for three days, nourished by a hen who came regularly (says a Huguenot chronicler) and laid an egg in his hand. Of the Admiral's less intimate followers, those who lodged in the Faubourg St. Germain contrived to get off into the country. Caumont and the Vidame de Chartres were of the number, but most important among the fugitives was Montgomery, the redoubted Huguenot chief, the only man now left to take the Admiral's place as a leader. With the sound of the bells and the first volleys, he got up and rode into the streets to discover the reason of the disturbance. Almost as he asked, he saw Guise, Aumale, and the Chevalier d'Angoulême advancing and grasped that their presence meant danger. He gave himself no time to learn that Coligny was dead. Spurring his horse, he fled through the twilight. Guise pursued him with fierce haste, but Montgomery's horse was of the swiftest and the Duke at last unwillingly gave in.

He returned from his vain chase more arrogant than ever, and, knowing Catherine's methods, he forestalled them. He repaired to the King and refused to take upon his shoulders the sole responsibility of the massacre. Charles unflinchingly acknowledged that everything which Guise had done was in obedience to *his* commands and in no wise for independent

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motives. This was on August 25, and the next day the King went to the Parlement, and, appearing there "utterly distraught," he made a public declaration that he alone was answerable for "the St. Bartholomew." Its awful aftermath was still going on. He made, at the instigation of Pibrac, another effort to end slaughter and pillage, and ordered a proclamation forbidding further outrage to be read aloud in all the public squares. The carnage was gradually ceasing when a supposed miracle unhappily revived it.

Had Paris not a warrant for its doings, signs and wonders to show that Heaven was approving? On August 25 a portent occurred. A hawthorn in the Cemetery of the Innocents had suddenly blossomed. In vain did learned men shake their heads and point out that "unseasonable flowers sometimes blossomed both in the autumn and the spring." The city went mad with rejoicing—bells pealed as they did at Easter. And the powers above were generous to the cause of the Church. A new star appeared near Cassiopeia's Chair—"the star of the East" for the orthodox, the symbol of their salvation. The Huguenots interpreted it differently. They also called it the Star of the East, but in their eyes it only figured as heralding the slaughter of the Innocents, and as it was one of themselves—no less a person than Béza—who first sighted it, they had reason to speak with authority.

Paris gave itself up to festivity. There were pilgrimages to the miraculous hawthorn, and also to the gallows at Mont-faucon. There were gala days for Church and for Parlement. And, from the 24th onwards, there were solemn processions to the churches—the Royalties making their stations on foot, gorgeous in jewels and brocade. The biggest of these thanksgiving functions was on the 28th of the month, when the streets were paraded by the whole Court, with the exception of the unyielding Condé, and of Navarre who was not yet to be trusted. That same day was published a Royal Proclamation concerning "the cause and occasion of the death of the Admiral and his accomplices." It was supplemented by divers decrees—one forbidding any public gathering under pain both of life and property; another ordering the release of all the victims "still in the prisons, excepting such as had been leaders of the riots and accomplices in the recent conspiracy." But two days later, Charles revoked every verbal order that he had given. He was a nerveless reed, shaken by every gust of wind.

Not so his mother. She was safe at last, and she emerged

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as one refreshed by her experiences. "She looks a younger woman by ten years and gives me the impression of a person who has come out of a serious illness, or escaped a great danger," wrote D'Elbène, the envoy, to his master, the Duke of Savoy. Catherine herself bears him out. "She was never before," she said, "in a place where she had so great occasion for fear, and from the which she had issued with more ease and pleasure." Her sense of relief and triumph penetrated all her conversation. The Spanish Ambassador came to take leave of her. "Come," she said, "am I, after all, such a bad Christian as Don François d'Alava pretended? Go back to your master—tell him what you have seen, tell him what you have heard. The blind have sight, the lame walk; and do not forget to add '*Beatus qui non fuerit in me scandalisatus.*'" To the Tuscan envoy she was franker. "It was better that it should fall upon them than upon us," was her comment. And to the Duke of Savoy's agent: "What has been done was more than necessary," she observed—"And the Duke need not regret the Admiral, who had no affection for him." It was with a light heart and a step grown "ten years younger" that she joined in the processions through Paris.

There were other pilgrims besides her and hers. Rather later a sad little troop took its silent way to Montfaucon—chief among the travellers, the sons of Coligny. When they came to the gibbet and what hung there, exposed to the sun and the rain, the elder boy, some fifteen years old, was almost broken by his sobs; the younger, not more than seven, stood silent, gazing sorrow-struck before him.¹

One last injury was done to the Admiral. His rooms were rifled and his papers carried to the King. Among them were the precious reminiscences "of the late religious troubles in the kingdom," that he had written during the last two years. His enemies were bitterly disappointed to find in them nothing incriminating and everything that was fine and loyal. Other documents came with them to the Louvre—his "Memorandum on the State," in which he warned the King against giving great retinues to his brothers; and his "Notes on the War in the Netherlands," which urged Charles to take the proffered Flemish territories on the plea that if he did not, England would. "That is beautifully done, it deserves to be printed,"

¹ Jacqueline, his second wife, was put in prison at Nice on account of her religion and died there, after thirty years' confinement.

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said some one who was standing by. Retz took fright lest the impressionable King should be affected. He diverted his attention from what he was doing and put the manuscript in the fire. Catherine had already made use of it. Before the notes were brought to Charles, they had been shown by her to Walsingham. They provided her with a ready means of taunting him. "Here he is," she sneered, "your noble friend ! You can see for yourself how he loved England." "Madam, he loved France," retorted Walsingham, with double-edged dignity.

But if Catherine was calm, the Court did not follow her example. They were all in the same storm-tossed boat, clinging together, bound closely by the dreadful tie of a common guilt. Only Alençon sulked apart ; he had been kept out of the business and he did not forgive the slight. The rest tried their usual distractions—dressed, gossiped, jested ; in vain, they could not forget. A week after the massacre the King and his suite were sitting at evening in the palace. Everything had been as usual when, all of a sudden, they started : a tumult of sound rose above them, a noise which did not seem of the earth. Navarre, who in after days described the scene to d'Aubigné, could never tell the story "without his hair standing on end." They looked at each other in speechless terror, then they all went out to see what it was. A black cloud of deathly ravens had perched upon the Louvre and were croaking just over their heads. The omen was evil ; it unstrung them. The *dames bigottes* were horrified and confided their distress to the King.

They did not get much comfort out of him ; he was the prey of his conscience. "That same night," ran Navarre's tale, "two hours after he was got to bed, the King leaped up with a start ; he roused the gentlemen of his bedchamber and sent, among others, for his brother-in-law. It was that we might all hear a great roaring which he himself heard in the air, and a concert of voices, crying, groaning, howling, blaspheming, exactly like those that arose upon the night of the massacre." The sounds were so distinct that Charles thought there was a riot in the town against the Montmorencys and sent his Guard to prevent murder. "But they returning with the tidings that the city lay in peace, that the atmosphere alone was troubled, he remained sorely distressed, the more so for that this din went on for a week, and always at the same hour."

The Furies had begun to hunt the King. Catherine's turn and Anjou's were to come. For the rest of the *dramatis*

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personæ, Nemesis overtook the chief ones. Bême was made a prisoner and killed in Poitou ; his colleagues, Cosseins and Attin, lost their lives at the siege of La Rochelle. So ended " the St. Bartholomew " in Paris. " And that deed," wrote one till then a loyal Catholic, " made me thenceforth love the cause and the persons of those who embraced the Religion." " That horrible and most execrable massacre : a cruelty so barbarous and inhuman that as long as the world shall be the world, and after the world has perished, so long shall the authors of this enterprise be held in perpetual execration "—this was the verdict of Béza, and posterity will not gainsay him.

CHAPTER X

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THE Provinces followed the example of Paris, and the carnage in the country adds fresh horror to the picture. On August 24 Charles sent letters to the provincial Governors to tell them of what had taken place. The feud, he said, between the Guises and the Châtillons had come to an awful crisis; he had been powerless to stem the uncontrollable torrent, and the end had been wholesale slaughter. The only thing that he and his mother could do was to secure their own persons in the Louvre. Anjou wrote in the same strain; the serious brawl between these personal enemies had occurred "to his very great regret." Shortly after, the King changed his tune. The rising, he now stated, had been in self-defence—to quell an organized conspiracy of Coligny's; but, in spite of this, he wished such Protestants as lived in peace to remain unmolested. At the same time he despatched verbal orders which directly contradicted the written ones and instigated wide-spread massacre. Catherine pursued a like course. At one moment Charles seems to have veered round yet again, for on the 27th, he sent fresh letters recommending the Governors to exercise mercy. But the bloodshed had begun, and it went on.

Its extent was sufficiently appalling. Yet it encountered more obstacles than in Paris. In Auvergne, in Dauphiné, in Provence, the Governors refused to massacre until they should have the royal command in writing, and the mercy shown by Gorde and the Comte de Tende, the Governors of the last two provinces, and by the Duc de Joyeuse in Languedoc, deserves the gratitude of posterity. Burgundy and Picardy, Nantes, Montpellier, and Bayonne proved to be no less humane, and at Lyons, as well as in other towns, the men who were deputed to kill at first withheld obedience. "They only knew," they said, "how to take life in the course of justice, or of war."

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Afterwards this softer mood yielded and the sword had its way. But even in the fiercer South, the citizens needed some persuasion to murder, and, before Bordeaux would set to work, it required a supernatural sanction : a Jesuit from the Collège de France had to inform it that St. Michael himself (it was near Michaelmas) had decreed the orgy. Other cities were readier for their task, and at Dijon, Rouen, Blois, Tours, Saumur, Angers, among others, the list of the dead was a cruel one. The statistics of their numbers vary according to the creed and the credulity of the historian. In Orleans, 2,000 were reputed to have been killed, but the minister, Toussaint, who escaped, only mentions seven hundred, and that is still the tradition in the town. In Toulouse again, where the record of the slain was two hundred, Duranti only writes of thirty-six. The result of Lord Acton's investigation is that in five country towns one to seven hundred persons were destroyed ; in other places the figures were less. The same authority reckons that throughout the whole of France not more than 5,000 were killed ; but a more recent writer ¹ regards this computation as much below the right one, and considers that ten to twenty thousand would be nearer the mark.

Meanwhile, despatches containing accounts of the massacre, according to the version of Charles and Catherine, were posted to the sovereigns outside France. When Philip of Spain heard the news, it is said that he laughed aloud for the first time in his life. What he had desired, even counselled, had at length come to pass. He praised the "profound dissimulation" of Charles, who "was now in truth *le Roi très-Chrétien*." He congratulated Catherine on having "so successfully educated her son in her own image." "You can hardly imagine," ran a letter to Spain, intended to win Philip's favour, "the honour and glory which the French have got by their exploit. The good all the world over now look to them." Rome would have endorsed the words. The rejoicings there were tremendous. The Cardinal de Lorraine, still in that city, gave the *courrier* who brought the first unofficial tidings a thousand crowns for his pains. And when professional accounts came, the town was illuminated ; the cannons of the Castel Sant Angelo fired off victorious salvos ; bells pealed ; *Te Deums* were sung ; the Pope and the College of Cardinals went to give thanks in the Church of St. Mark for this "signal

¹ Whitehead "Gaspard de Coligny."

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favour shown to Christian people." "In these times so full of turbulence," said His Holiness, "God seems to be beginning to turn His pitiful eyes upon us." A few days later, Gregory went on foot in state from St. Mark's to St. Louis's, "accompanied by all the Ambassadors and by fifty-three Cardinals."

Catherine had already had a medal struck in honour of the event. "*Pietas excusavit justitiam*," was the inscription upon it, surmounted by fleurs-de-lys and the French crown. Gregory XIII coined a rival medal. On one side it was stamped with his own image; on the other with the destroying angel striking the Huguenots with his sword; and round about him was written: "*Huguenotorum strages*." Vasari was summoned to the Vatican to paint the chief scenes of the massacre on its walls. A Cardinal was sent to Paris to wish joy to the King, and, as he passed through Lyons, its citizens, still in the midst of their bloody work, knelt in the streets to receive his public benediction.

"Sire," wrote Lorraine from Rome to Charles, "this is the very best thing that ever I could have dared to hope."

Very stern was the reception of the event in the Courts of England and of Holland. When William the Silent first heard of the tragedy, which was also the tragedy of his cause, he showed no sign of his emotion. The messenger stood before him. "I had," he said, "taken your master, the King, as the bulwark of my chiefest business; it seemeth impossible that in the eyes of the German Princes and other Protestants he should ever purge himself of what he hath done. It is very needful that he should now take good counsel, for I foresee that his realm will again be plunged in fresh trouble."

In England, the news wrought disturbance. In that last week of August, Elizabeth, still toying with the French marriage, was entertaining La Mothe Fénélon at Kenilworth—hunting with him in the forest, playing the spinet to his plaudits. Transactions were going on concerning Flanders and Fénélon was sent to London about them. He arrived there almost at the same moment as the tidings of the massacre. The effect was dramatic. Within a few days, the city was crowded with refugees from France. A report was spread abroad that the French were in league with Spain and the Pope to exterminate the Protestants throughout Europe. The Londoners were seized with fright. Every Papist was looked upon as a murderer in disguise and, taking fire from overseas, they threatened to give the Catholics "Paris Justice." So crucial

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did matters become that Burleigh had to hurry to town to check the ominous panic.

For some time Elizabeth, horrified, refused an audience to the French ambassador, and it was not till September 8 that she consented to grant it. She had by then moved to Woodstock, and it was there that she received him. La Mothe-Fénélon's return was a contrast to his going. He had left a coquettish woman; he met again an angry Queen. She had put aside ordinary customs and—an unusual occurrence—convened her whole Council to attend her. Bedford and Bacon alone were too ill to obey the summons. The envoy found her robed in black, encircled by her Councillors and by the entire Court, all dressed, like herself, in deep mourning. He entered; there was profound silence, and "every eye, lowering and wrathful, was turned upon him." The Queen made a few steps forward and, taking him apart, withdrew into the recess of a window. "Are the common rumours true?" she asked curtly. "The suddenness of the danger," said La Mothe-Fénélon "did not even leave the King time for reflection. He was forced to allow the conspirators to fulfil all their designs against the Admiral." "Nothing," he added, "had been preconceived by Charles; religion was not in the business, and the Edict would be observed in its integrity." He hoped sincerely that the "good understanding between France and England would in no wise be cooled or diminished." Elizabeth replied in icy tones that she feared a King who had abandoned his subjects would also desert his allies. She only hoped that he would produce evidence of the Huguenots' conspiracy and would faithfully protect such among them as were not concerned in the plot. Fénélon changed the subject and reminded Elizabeth of her promise to stand godmother to the child about to be born to the King of France. But the Queen of England was not to be cajoled. She had intended, she told him, "to send to Paris the most honourable embassy that had ever left the shores of England, but now she was quite resolved that she would not risk any life she valued in so obviously unsafe a country. She would not trust Leicester there, she answered, when Fénélon said that the French Court was expecting him; and to his hopes that she would not reject Alençon she gave no satisfactory rejoinder. All the same she ended by yielding to persuasion. Catherine cringed before her and she duly officiated as sponsor to Charles's short-lived son and heir.

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The English ministers and the envoys in Paris were more lastingly shocked than the Queen. France, Burleigh exclaimed to Fénélon, had committed the greatest crime that there had been since the Crucifixion. And the fine protesting English conscience also marked the utterances of the ambassadors. "So is the journeyer slain by the robber, so the hen by the fox, so the hind by the lion, so Abel by Cain," said Sir Thomas Smith. "Grant that they were guilty, that they dreamed treason in their sleep. What have the innocent men, women and children done at Lyons, at Rouen, at Caen, at La Rochelle? Will God sleep?" And when Charles tried to excuse the affair to Walsingham—"There is no excuse," exclaimed the envoy—"If the Huguenots were really guilty, they should have been punished with justice, not by murder." But on this point Smith did not agree with Walsingham. He believed in Charles's innocence, and said that "he was sorry for the King, whom he esteemed . . . the sincerest monarch living." And Fénélon was of the same opinion. He told Leicester that the King detested the massacre and would soon avenge it. Elizabeth, as usual, steered a middle course; she did not recall Walsingham to England, but the relations between the two Courts remained cold.

In whatever way the news was received, and whether by Catholics or Protestants, nowhere, except in Rome and Spain, did it benefit Catherine's reputation. And, even although Philip had praised her, his agent was clear as to her motives. "There is no need to bear her any good will for what she has done," wrote Cuniga to his master: "she has only acted in her own interests, not at all in those of her son, the King, or in those of the State." "It is *la sua vendetta*," was the Venetian Michieli's comment. As for the Emperor of Austria, when the French envoy wanted to assure him that a Huguenot plot had caused the mischief, he would not let him finish. "I hear from Rome," he broke in, "that the Cardinal de Lorraine affirms that what has been done in Paris was decided on before he quitted France. . . . If any one wants to do a thing, the pretexts are never wanting." Among the Princes of Germany, the effect made was the same. "Madame," wrote one thence to the Queen-Mother, "this truth is certain and indubitable—that the massacres which have taken place throughout the kingdom of France . . . have so extremely moved and altered the humour of those outside your country who are well-affectioned to your Crown, that even though they be entirely

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Catholic, they cannot rest satisfied with any excuse whatever. . . . For they impute all that has been done to you alone and to Monseigneur d'Anjou . . . and since, Madame, I myself believe nothing of all this matter, I greatly desire to write and beg you to guard yourself better than you have done."

But even then, few of those who blamed Catherine credited her with a deliberate plan of general slaughter. The Nuncio, Salviati, it is true, brings forward the current report that Navarre's wedding was a trap laid to catch Protestants; the bride, he said, had an eye to this purpose when she declared that if she were not married in Paris, she would be wronged as a *Fille de France*. But the story is finally disposed of by the fact that Paris was an after-thought, that the ceremony was meant to be at Blois, where space was limited. That the final choice of Paris appeared to the Admiral's enemies to provide them with a heaven-sent opportunity for his murder is another matter.

The doubts as to the nature of the scheme which soon began to occupy men's thoughts offered the same problems to the mind that have since so much perplexed posterity: how far the whole affair was premeditated; how much of it was settled at Bayonne. The question is now practically solved. Discoveries of new documents, fresh light upon old ones, a critical investigation of ancient records—all point alike to one answer: that the hideous business was not planned in the form which it finally assumed, and that Catherine was hurried into it. But, none the less, it is apparent that some scheme was concerted at Bayonne, seven years before the catastrophe. And here we have surer ground to tread on than probability—the *terra firma* of evidence.

Soon after the massacre, on September 10, Alva wrote to Don Diego de Cuniga. "Often," he said, "have I remembered the words I spoke to the Queen-Mother at Bayonne and what she promised me. I see now how well she has kept her word."

In this conspiracy there is no doubt that contemporary Huguenots believed. "The Protestants," wrote the old historian, de Thou, "who are very suspicious folk, have made public that a secret treaty was concluded at Bayonne between the two Kings (of France and Spain) to re-establish the ancient religion and to crush and extirpate the new one." Smith, the English Ambassador, believed in this, and, after the event, he wrote as much to Leicester. Walsingham also took occasion

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to tax Catherine with the existence of such a pact. But they did not define its nature.

The idea of a big massacre was no new one. "For ten years," says Lord Acton, "the Court had regarded such a massacre as the last resource of monarchs," and Catherine herself had said that it had been contemplated from 1562, onwards. As early as 1563, just after the Peace of Amboise, the Huguenot leaders received a secret warning. "Those of C——," it ran, "have taken counsel together, and after the Mercenaries have departed, they intend on one and the same day to give the Sicilian Vespers to those of the Religion. Warn M. le Prince, M. l'Amiral and M. d'Andelot to be on their guard, for *they* intend to play them a bad turn and kill them all three on the same day if *they* can." And again, seven years later, the notion of a general slaughter reappears. In 1570, the Archbishop of Nazareth wrote to the Pope to inform him that the Treaty of Saint-Germain, so full of advantages for the Huguenots, had only been concluded under one understanding: that as soon as their suspicions had been lulled, the Catholics were to fall on and destroy them. It must be added that this seems the only mention of the conspiracy, and that the Archbishop, a keen partisan, would easily believe the evil rumours which filled the air.

The date of his letter to the Vatican was five years after the meeting at Bayonne. But it is highly improbable that the projects of Catherine and Alva then assumed these wholesale proportions. It is more likely that the death of Coligny and that of the principal Huguenots (which was involved in their chief's assassination) was the scheme resolved upon; for both the confederates knew well that this would be enough to inflame the stricken Huguenots and make them rise. Only one result could follow—the annihilation of the Protestant power. Both took the same view—that without their leaders the Huguenots were nothing; and both would naturally choose the same means to attain their ends: the vendetta between the Guises and Châtillons, the readiest road to their goal. But how and when the deed was to be done would naturally have been left to Catherine; and whatever the plan they debated, they would at that time have but vaguely sketched it out.

Their decision undoubtedly embodied the popular opinion. "It would be more expeditious to have a few heads cut off quickly," was the speech of a Catholic to Alva, and it summarized the average expectation. He and Catherine expressed

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little more than the extreme conclusion of current ideas. Did not Correro write to England, advising *un sirop résolutif* as a soothing draught for Mary, Queen of Scots?

How Catherine tried to fulfil her pledge to Alva we have already seen in her repeated plots against the life of Coligny, culminating in her offer, in 1569, of 5,000 crowns for his head. It was about this time also—between 1568 and 1571—that a crucial talk took place between her and the Papal Nuncio. "She and the King," she told him, "had nothing more at heart than one day to catch the Admiral and his followers and to make such slaughter among them that it should be memorable for ever."

But her schemes failed and her baffled hatred only grew the stronger for the failure. Navarre used to say in after days that it was jealousy, and jealousy alone, which had prompted the Queen-Mother's course. "The Protestant historians," he observed, "were wrong to omit these truths from their narratives. They are bent on seeing nothing but religion where policy fills so great a space." And Catherine's "policy" grew in scope. More and more, as Coligny's sway over the King increased, did her enmity, fostered alike by private and by public motives, concentrate itself upon the desire to get rid of him. It became her fixed idea, and whatever vague imagination there may have been of universal vengeance, it receded into the background beside the actual ever-present thought. And she knew that when it was time for her to put it into execution, she would also have to compass the death of his chief colleagues, or the safety of herself and hers would be endangered. The moment came, and once again she failed. Her terror of the effect upon the Huguenots of Tosinghi's hapless shot; her expectation that her own forecastings would now be fulfilled, made her meet what she dreaded half-way. When she heard of a definite conspiracy of the Huguenots she lost her balance. Fear had been, throughout her life, the one foible which got dominion over her. Now it precipitated her into action, and she committed the worst blunder of her life.

And yet, though her deed was unpremeditated, we can trace in her promptitude of thought, in the speed with which she organized the massacre, her familiarity with the idea of it. The vague projects of 1562 and 1563—perhaps also the discussions with Alva which had made them both reject such vast measures—came to her help when the hour

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struck and quickened her invention. And we must remember that the immediately surrounding atmosphere made her achievement more practicable. The notion of a slaughter in Paris was, as we know, in the air. Had not the city prophesied *les noces vermeilles*? And had not the wizard whom Alva consulted foretold that shortly "marvels" would happen? The purpose once engendered, such presentiments facilitated its progress. But they did not give it birth. Its conception may not have been remote from the consciousness of the day; the fact none the less remains, that it sprang from no set design.

Tavannes was of this opinion. "From their Majesties' present peril," he wrote, "and from that of the affrighted courtiers was born the necessary resolve . . . to kill the Admiral and all his chief partisans—a counsel born of the occasion, because of the imprudence of the Huguenots. Nor could the enterprise have been accomplished without discovery, had it been imagined beforehand."

Correro, who discusses the matter, gives no hint that there was foreknowledge of a general butchery, he only criticizes its wisdom. "It is," he writes, "a common opinion that it would have been enough if, from the outset, five or six heads, and no more, had been disposed of. By this means, the compact organization of the (Protestant) plot would have been shattered; the nobles would have been intimidated, the people discouraged; for they only believe that they are invincible the while they are under the leadership of some chief with a famous name. . . . These chiefs once removed, the nobles of themselves would have surrendered. . . . The poor, stripped of their generals' authority . . . would have been pushed to the Mass, like a flock that is driven with a stick. . . . But to effect this, a King was needed full of resolution—one who would strike the blow before men had a notion it was coming. And in his place there was a young Prince, chilly and timid, who dared not say 'yes' or 'no' without his mother's consent."

Salviati bore out Tavannes. Twelve days before the massacre, in a letter to the Cardinal of Como—"May our Lord God," he said, "grant that I may one day write you something which will bring joy and contentment to His Holiness!" But the "something" (a probable allusion to the death of Coligny) proved different from his expectations. After the massacre, he wrote again to the same correspondent—"If

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the Admiral," he commented, " had but died of that arquebus shot . . . I cannot believe that so many people would have been killed. When, a few days ago, I wrote to your Eminence in cipher that the Admiral had gone too far and that they were going to rap him over the knuckles, I felt convinced that they could bear him no longer ; and thus was I still persuaded when, in my ordinary despatch, I wrote that I hoped soon to give some good news to His Holiness ; but I did not believe in the tenth part of what I now see under my eyes."

The Spanish Ambassador also broached his views in much the same strain. " Although the French gave us to understand," said he to Philip, " that their King had been planning this blow ever since he made peace with the Huguenots, and although they tax him with stratagems which could not seem permissible even when used against rebels or heretics, yet I know this for certain : that the shot fired at the Admiral was a project only fixed upon a few days before the event. . . . All the rest was inspired by circumstances."

Brantôme sums up the whole matter. " There are some," he concludes, " who cannot get it out of their heads that the web was spun long ago, but such beliefs are nothing but delusions."

The exact degree of the King's foreknowledge has been another point of discussion. We may safely assume that Catherine told him only so much of her schemes as she thought advisable. But those who have studied his nature may be equally sure that Charles IX was entirely innocent of any share in the plot to kill the Admiral. The authorities who think otherwise have been too much absorbed in the sequence of events to lend due importance to the consideration of character, or to remember that men do not wholly belie their temperaments. All the qualities of Charles, his conduct before the event and after it, invalidate such a charge and go to prove that even his mother's influence could not compel him to such a piece of treachery. Whatever vague dread haunted the atmosphere, for him, as far as Coligny was concerned, it took no distincter form than a resolve to keep special guard over him. And in matters apart from the Admiral, he would have had no hesitation in lying. To assuage Catherine, to make the moment smooth, there was nothing that he, the promise-breaker, would not promise, trusting to time to make his defection easy. This course came the more readily to him, because, possessing no sequence, he lived in the moment and nothing further off had sequence

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for him. There is thus no difficulty in explaining the fact, attested by contemporary testimony, that he was aware there was some design afloat against the Huguenots to which he gave his verbal assent. When, before Navarre's wedding, the Papal Legate came to Blois, chiefly to try and break off the heretical match, he received such information from the King as he (the Legate) would only tell the Pope himself. The marriage, Charles had said, had only been allowed to afford an occasion for wreaking vengeance upon the Huguenots. "God be praised, the King of France has kept his word!" Cardinal Borghese is reported to have exclaimed when the news of the massacre reached Rome—but neither the ejaculation, nor the Legate's story, is evidence that Charles contemplated the definite fulfilment of threats which were not made for the first time—still less that he was in any way a conspirator against the life of Coligny.

Court casuists tried to justify their sovereign in their own fashion. "The King," said Tavannes, "finding himself between two wars, was compelled to choose the least perilous, and to set God upon his side. If the Huguenots had escaped, they would have caused the death of a million of poor people. And it is ever more legitimate for a King to adventure against his subjects, however abnormal his methods, than for subjects to adventure against their King." "One must never," argued Retz, "offend by halves. Brutus almost failed when, declaring that Cæsar alone was guilty, he refused to take the life of Anthony, who afterwards revolted and caused his ruin. Nothing must be left that could possibly occasion the destruction of peace. And what is just in the case of a leader, is just in the case of all."

But special pleading such as this was not general. The very recorders we have quoted show, by their reluctance to admit preconception of the outrage, some vestige of a public conscience. And we must not blind our eyes to the fact that there existed throughout France a large body of respectable Catholics who were overwhelmed with dismay at the event. Such as these, thinks Lord Acton, made the nucleus of the *Politiques*, or Moderates, who were to become, in later days, so prominent a party in the State—"those," as that great student defines them, "whose solicitude for dogma did not entirely silence the moral sense and the voice of conscience and who did not wish religious unity or ascendancy to be preserved by crime; . . . those who became promoters of the

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regal authority against the aggression of the clergy, the aristocracy and the democracy." These men, among whom the Protestant-minded Montmorencys were prominent, soon became allied to the Huguenots. And as soon as they had grown to be a power, they found a chief to their hand in Alençon, who made himself the leader of the group, not from any moral conviction, but from disaffection to the King and his mother, and because of the grudge that he bore them for keeping him out of the recent conspiracy.

The formation of this faction was, perhaps, the most lasting result of the massacre. It also ended, for the time, the dallies of Elizabeth with her French suitor. Catherine had a crucial interview with Walsingham. As a pretext for England's present distrust, he urged the Queen-Mother's behaviour to Spain and her former dealings with regard to Anjou, which would now most likely be regarded as a mere preparation for the Eve of St. Bartholomew. "That Eve," he said sternly, "was, in truth, a declaration of war against the Protestant Princes of Germany. And what, above all, about her betrayal of the Admiral?" Catherine evaded a direct answer. "Our lately concluded alliance was made with the Queen, not with the Admiral. In what have we failed her?" she asked—"And you know, Monsieur, that our King François I and your King Henry VIII were very good friends, yet their views of the Pope were widely different." "Madame, the times were not the same; there were as yet no interviews at Bayonne with Philip II." "All that business about confederacies at Bayonne is a detestable invention of the Admiral's to stir the Princes of the Blood against the Crown. There was nothing at Bayonne but feasting and amusement. Besides, your Queen was not so sure of the Admiral as she thought. In a will which he once made when he was ill at La Rochelle, he advised the King to keep down Spain and England as much as he could, that the tranquillity of his own realm might be ensured." Walsingham's reply was like an echo of his speech after the massacre. "You are singing his praise when you say that," he answered. Again Catherine parried. "All that I can say is that I passionately desire your Queen's marriage with the Duc d'Alençon," she said, and paused. Walsingham eyed her narrowly. "Is it," he asked, "your son's intention to grant liberty of conscience to his subjects?" "Yes," she replied curtly. "And liberty of worship?" he continued. "My son desires that there should be only one form of worship throughout France."

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"Then, Madame, his Edicts will not be carried into effect?" "My son has discovered certain things that compel him to nullify them." "Then your wish is, Madame, that there should be people who live without any religion at all?" "The Calvinists, Monsieur, will be suffered in the same way as the Catholics are suffered by your mistress in England." "My mistress, Madame, has never promised anything by edict; if she had done so, the Edict would have been observed inviolably." This was too much for Catherine. "Your Mistress can govern her kingdom as she likes—the King of France will govern his," she said, and put an end to the colloquy. Walsingham got nothing definite out of her. The semblance of the project for the marriage appeared to be dissolved; a reality it never could have been.

One personal effect was produced by those fatal days of August. The King was never the same again. He had freed himself from his mother's tyranny, and from this time forth he opposed her. A certain brutality distinguished his manner towards her. One day, some months later, when he was hunting, the sole distraction that silenced his brooding thoughts, he got angry with his huntsmen and his hounds.¹ "*Hé mon fils!*" said Catherine who was present, "you were better advised to get angry with those at La Rochelle¹ who are causing death to so many of your good servants, than with your huntsmen and your hounds." "*Hé mon Dieu!*" cried the King savagely—"Who but you is the cause of this? God's Blood, you are the cause of all!" He turned on his heel and left her, "exceeding wroth." Groaning and weeping, she went away to her room, and finding herself with some of the most familiar among her women—"I have always said," quoth she, "that I had to do with a lunatic and that I never could make anything of him."

Charles did not recover his spirits. He remained gloomy and morose to the last day of his life. "Take good care to be cautious and talk cautiously," was the Duc de Longueville's advice to Walsingham, "for you will no longer be speaking to the gentle King, benign and gracious, the which you have known heretofore. He is entirely changed. And there is nowadays more of severity in his countenance¹ than ever there has been of amenity."

But he did not again incline towards the Protestants.

¹ La Rochelle was at that moment being besieged by Anjou's army.

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From 1572 onwards, real liberty of worship was refused them. "Madame," wrote the Duchesse de Guise to her Protestant mother, Renée of Ferrara, "I am grieved to tell you anything that grieves you ; but I should not feel it right to conceal from you that the King is about to frame an Edict commanding every soul in his kingdom to go to Mass. And the King of Navarre and his Queen attended Mass this morning in the presence of the Papal Nuncio and the Prince de Condé and three of his brothers. If you do not go, I am afraid they will avenge it on your followers. They have so firmly decided against liberty of worship, and are so resolute that all people in this kingdom shall confess their own faith, that I fear they will command you to do so."

These words sound the epitaph of St. Bartholomew's Eve. The apparent death of liberty—its stealthy growth in hidden places—this was the real harvest of the massacre.

CHAPTER XI

The End of the Reign of Charles IX

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IF Catherine's part in the massacre had injured her abroad, it now added a final touch to her ill-reputation at home. The tide had turned against her. The country was the prey of moral paralysis; throughout it there reigned an indifference which was but the natural result of the horrors that it had just experienced. Many of those who had taken part in them died mad, or else crushed by despair. But whether remorseful or inert, their blame fell upon the Queen-Mother. A certain creature of hers, Dardiani, reported a conversation which he had had with two Catholic gentlemen, and it was a fair epitome of current views. "We repaired all three to a room," he wrote, "where they began to gossip with me. 'How on earth,' said they, 'can you trust the Queen-Mother, seeing the tragedies that we all know she hath enacted, as much on one side as the other? It will not do for either to think that religion has anything to do with it, for the good lady believes in none, however much she fears God—in the same fashion as the devil fears Him.' As for the rest, it is impossible not to see that she is the cause of all the misfortunes that have happened in our poor kingdom, because of the irreconcilable hatred that she bears towards our nation, on which, whatever the price, she desires to be avenged—and always under the pretext of religion." The long list that follows of the murders that they supposed her to have committed, though untrue, shows the estimation in which she was held. "She had the late *Sieur d'Andelot* poisoned, and his brother, the *Cardinal de Châtillon*, and the late *Queen of Navarre*. Thereafter, she alone was the cause of the horrible massacre of all France; and then she attempted to poison her son, *Monsieur le Duc (d'Alençon)* who, however got off easily with only having scarlet fever. Next the *Duc de Longueville* and the *Duc de Bouillon* (whose doctor was

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hanged for it at Sedan), and, more than all, she got Duville to poison the Prince Poitien."

• This is but a paraphrase of the rhymes that were current in men's mouths—the common flow of doggerel about her, whether penned by Huguenots or others. There are two which are sufficiently expressive.

Pour bien sçavoir la consonance
De Catherine et Jhésabel,
L'une, ruyne d'Israel,
L'autre, ruyne de la France :

Jésabel maintenoit l'idolle
Contraire à la sainte parolle,
L'autre maintient la papaulté
Par trahison et cruauté :

Par l'une furent massacrez
Les prophètes à Dieu sacrez,
Et l'autre a faict mourir cent mille
De ceulx qui suyvent l'Evangille ;

L'une pour se ayder du bien,
Fist mourir ung homme de bien,
L'autre n'est pas assouvie
S'elle n'a les biens et la vie :

Enfin le jugement fut tel
Que les chiens mengent Jhésabel
Par une vangeance divine ;
Mais la charongne¹ de Catherine
Sera différente en ce point,
Car les chiens ne la voudront point.

The second poem, printed in a journal of the time, under the date of 1575, was probably popular both before that date and after.

Laisse ta rouge couleur,
O ruine de la France !
Et porte nostre malheur
En ta ville de Florence.
* * * * *
L'athéiste et le moqueur
De toute divine essence,
Te conduiront de bon cœur
Et seront ton assurance.
* * * * *
Oste-nous ceste langueur,
Seulement par ton absence,

¹ Flesh.

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Ou bien le Prince vainqueur
Viendra rompre ta cadance.

Le Roi, nostre seul seigneur,
En prendra resjouissance
Et deviendra plus majeur,
Quittant ton obéissance.

Little did Catherine heed the dislike of her subjects. Hatred is of small account to those who do not know how to love, and she kept up her reputation for good nature by amusing herself with what was said of her. "She is perfectly well aware," wrote Michieli, "that all the evils of the kingdom are imputed to her and that she is detested. But she does not care a fig either for the ill-will or the accusations which folk pile upon her. She knows the books published against her and that they are sold almost publicly in the shops, but nothing disconcerts her." "At this time," said another contemporary, "the Life of the Queen-Mother by a Huguenot, which has been vulgarly called the Life of St. Catherine, is circulating everywhere. The cellars of Lyons are full of it, and the Queen-Mother herself has it read aloud to her, and laughs till she can hardly hold herself. She says that if they had only given her notice before, she would have told them many other things of which they knew nothing, and some that they had forgotten and that would have largely swelled the bulk of their book—dissimulating, *à la Florentine*, the evil talent which . . . she has hatched to thwart the Huguenots. . . . But the truth is that the book was as well received by Catholics as Huguenots—so odious is the name of this woman to the people, and I have heard Catholics, sworn enemies of the Huguenots, say that there was nothing in the volume that was not true: that, indeed, there was not the half of the real truth there, and that it was a pity that the whole story was not written. The Cardinal de Lorraine had read it, and one of his familiars named Montagne was talking to him about it and saying that he thought the greater part of its contents was nothing but a pack of lies. "I believe," replied the Cardinal, "that there is a good deal of travesty and artifice in certain things, but there is a great deal of truth also. I dare not say, as another did, that it is but too true. Believe me, Montagne, that Huguenot memoirs are not always very safe, but in this case they have hit the bull's eye. And I do know something about it."

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Did the Cardinal feel any twinges as he spoke thus of his old accomplice, or did he cheer himself with the thought that she was worse than he? One way of accounting for the base morality of those days is the fact that the average sinner—and even he who fell below the average—had always some one worse to refer to, whose doings made his own seem harmless.

Catherine's appearance lent itself to exaggerated rumours of her crimes. A woman who wore a talisman bracelet made of links, each of them a different symbolic stone graven with devils and magicians' hieroglyphs—one link formed from a human skull—is a woman who acts in character. And the Queen who frequented wizards and astrologers and was often governed by their counsels—who had portrait figures of her enemies made and watched—who saw three wax images of her sons run round a board covered with green baize and fall down one after another, a presage, according to the magician, that each should die a sudden death—might easily be suspected of their murder, and that of others. There was not a sensitive spot in the whole of her composition, and she had no ear for public opinion.

Had she possessed that organ, she might have recognized certain symptoms inimical to her desires. The enormities of Royalty had taught the country a lesson—the difference between the King and the Crown. On the Huguenots' side, also, things were changed. Till now, their rebellion had been covered by the names of the Princes of the Blood. But both of these had now seceded. Condé, their hope, had played them false; too weak to resist, he had followed Navarre and had undergone a temporary conversion. At last the Huguenots stood on their own basis, and that basis was democratic. A shower of Republican pamphlets from Protestant pens disseminated their opinions broadcast. The chief of them was Hotman's "*Franco-Gallia*," or "*Gaule française*," directed against the antiquated legal spirit inspired by old Rome, with its false idea of a civil liberty which could exist without political freedom. Its appeal to the "*sainte autorité de l'Assemblée nationale*" was, in truth, before its time; and so, perhaps, was "*La France-Turquie*," another treatise, setting out to expose Catherine's wish to reduce France to an Ottoman Empire. Catherine had to own that she had not killed Protestant thought. It was a danger to her power, and a danger to the safety of the State.

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The Huguenots proved it by getting bolder. They duly kept the anniversary of the St. Bartholomew ; on that day, the provinces of Languedoc and Haute Guienne met to organize their *Union Civile*—a Republican federation which resolved to demand bold terms of Catherine. They did so, and took her by surprise. She lost all her self-possession. " If Louis de Condé," she exclaimed, " were still alive and in the heart of France, if he were in Paris and had 50,000 foot and 20,000 horse, he would not have had the insolence to ask the half of what these lay claim to."

They did not get what they wanted, but they succeeded in asserting their force. The struggle between the two religions was still centred at La Rochelle, the Huguenot stronghold. Its conciliation was a most important measure. Charles actually took a wise step and sent the Protestant La Noue, who had defended Mons, as his intermediary to the Rochellois. They agreed to receive him, but not as an emissary, " merely as a private person." He found the town admirably administered and absolutely firm in its intentions. It would not make the concessions demanded, and the King prepared to attack it. A siege followed, conducted by Anjou, who was backed by Guise and Aumale ; and also by less familiar comrades, Condé and Navarre, who were anxious to prove the zeal of their conversion. Alençon, on his first trial, was also among the assailants. The heroic defence of the town belongs more to the days of the Old Testament than to those of Christianity. The women reinforced the men and showed themselves in a throng upon the towers, whence they poured down boiling pitch, stones, even cauldrons, upon the enemy beneath. Four times the sixty-eighth Psalm, " Let God show His face," resounded from the battlements, and it seemed as if the citizens' prayer were granted. From their high position they could watch all the movements of their besiegers, while they themselves felt secure. For they were safe, even against famine, an exceptional abundance of shell-fish having come to their coast at this time. On May-Day, in their triumph, they planted a hawthorn on the ramparts, as if grim war itself had blossomed. Their rejoicing was not without reason ; the army of their foes was disorganized, and weakened by distrust. More than once Condé, Navarre, and Alençon had threatened to desert it and to throw themselves into St. Jean d'Angély or Angoulême ; for the moment, Anjou's outlook was cheerless and there seemed but little hope ahead.

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his State-bed, the suggestions of his own imagination must have followed upon those of the Elector. And his torture was not yet completed. The Elector had the courage of his convictions. "One day, he took the Prince and two or three of his gentlemen into his Privy Closet. There, at the first glance, he (Anjou) saw the portrait of Monsieur the late Admiral, full-length and exceeding natural. Saith the Elector unto him: "You know that man well, Monsieur; you killed in him the greatest Captain in Christendom. You ought not to have done it. He would have rendered great service to you and to the King." The Prince was covered with confusion. He palliated the murder "the best and the gentlest way he could." "It was Coligny," he said, "who had wanted to kill them all, and he himself had been warned thereof." "We know the whole story, Sir," was all the Elector answered. When they came forth from the closet, the Prince was pale with fear; he thought the exhibition of the portrait portended some danger to himself.

The dire impression did not leave him. The experiences of those sleepless hours preyed upon his jaded nerves, and by the time he reached Cracow, the capital where he was to live, he was in a high fever. It was during a night there, when pursued by fancies and bad dreams which allowed him no rest, that he summoned "*Monsieur Tel*" (his friend Biron) to his bedside, that he might relieve his mind by confession. As he entered, Anjou called him by his name. "I have made you come here," he said, "to impart to you my miseries this night, which have so disturbed my repose. For I have been thinking of St. Bartholomew's Eve, and of how the business was accomplished—concerning which you have possibly not known the real truth, such as I am now about to relate it." And having thus spoken, he gave vent to the detailed statement of what happened, which was afterwards duly set down. But dissipation soon drowned the haunting remembrance, and he was left no wiser than before.

He was, it is true, safe in Poland, but Charles had only got rid of one brother to be plagued by another. From this time onward, Alençon becomes a prominent person. At the outset the King was well-disposed towards him, if only out of dislike to Anjou, but his sentiment was not returned. The one feeling common to the three brothers was their antipathy to one another and, in Alençon's case, the feeling was extended to Catherine. "The fault was hers," says Michieli, "for she



FRANÇOIS DE VALOIS, DUC D'ALENÇON, VERS 1580

BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE.

FRANÇOIS QUESNEL.

From a photograph by A. Giraudon

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made too much of the one son and loved him as the apple of her eye, while she did her best to humiliate the other." And if she chose him to be the object of her persistent persecution, it was not without a motive. His rise would have made against her own influence, and might, she feared, lead to machinations against her well-loved Anjou, even to his disinheritance, for he was once more heir-apparent. Charles's infant son had died, and his other child was a girl. "And so," continues the Ambassador, "these two (Anjou and Alençon) hate one another to the death. Beneath the walls of La Rochelle, so I heard, they very nearly came from insults to blows. And their hostility became envenomed when Monsieur (Alençon) learned the bad offices that his elder brother had done him, just before his departure for Poland—at the which time he begged the King not to give him (Alençon) the post of Lieutenant-General of the kingdom, which he himself was now leaving vacant. . . . Nor were there wanting those who exasperated Monsieur, and bore in upon him how much his brother and the Queen-Mother spurned him, and tried to keep him poor and in low place, with no credit, although he was the brother of the King."

Apart from private grudges, the position of a favourite at Court would never have suited Alençon's cards. He was too fond of shuffling his pack. Restless and acute, a born intriguer, he was the cleverest of his family, excepting Margot, who was soon to join forces with him. And, unlike his other relations, he was not content to attach himself to another power. He must be first, he must stand on an independent basis; he must command a faction of his own and have his private estate and retinue—that "*apanage*" which formed such a fruitful theme of quarrel between royal brethren. When aims are large, untiring energies such as these become dignified by the name of statesmanship. But the last Valois did not rise above intrigue. Alençon's ends were never noble, and mischief was written upon his brow. He was now about eighteen, very dark, and pitted by small-pox. Queen Elizabeth had pretended he was handsome, but even a courtier like the Venetian envoy expends no hyperbole upon his person. "He was small of figure," he writes, "and square; apt at any bodily fatigue or violent exercise, and well-skilled in the same."

This imp of ingenuity it was who gave the last blow to the King. He wanted to stir up disaffection and gain influence,

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and he saw his opportunity for doing so. The readiest road to reach his goal was to make himself the champion of the Huguenots. The *Politiques* were not as yet distinct or numerous enough to form a separate party. The Huguenots, on the other hand, were crying out for a leader. They had been accustomed to the generalship of Princes : Alençon seemed destined by Providence to fill the vacant command, and negotiations were opened between them.

Alençon lived in strange surroundings amidst a little court of his own, made up of medley elements : grave men with Protestant leanings ; roués and gay women and alchemists, most of them adventurers whose interests were bound up in his power, who so far worked easily upon his credulity that they made him believe that Spain, the Pope, and his mother were all in league against his life. And he had a more important fellow-conspirator. This was Navarre, no less than he in terror for his life, although in every other way his opposite : gay, gallant, brimful of vitality, a man who won men as well as women. He was also the embodiment of *l'esprit Gaulois*, a contrast to the Italian-spirited Alençon. Such were the two Princes to whom now came deputations from the Protestants.

It was early in 1574, and the Court was at Saint-Germain. Alençon had already been manœuvring to get the Lieutenant-Generalship, but his schemings to this end had failed. The King began to show signs of serious illness. It seemed an opportune, if a reckless, moment for the confederates' enterprise. There were secret comings and goings—mysterious meetings and long colloquies. And the upshot of the transactions was that Alençon consented to be the official chief of the Protestants and the *Politiques*. On a certain date he was to escape from Saint-Germain and to join them with a view to action. They, on their side, were to send troops to cover his flight—the condition on which he pledged them his faith. There was even a further project for seizing the person of the King. Montmorency, who knew of the plot and was ever an advocate of moderation, did his utmost to dissuade Alençon from executing it. In the hope of conciliating him, he went so far as to approach the King and beg the Lieutenant-Generalship on his behalf. Charles was not disinclined to grant it, but Catherine interfered. This was not the only occasion on which the King desired to send her off to Poland, to the Court of his brother. For although he was free from her influence, he had no force to break her

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power. As ever, alert for Anjou's interests, she vetoed Alençon's appointment, and Montmorency's efforts were futile.

It would have been well for Alençon had he listened to this wise counsellor. His plans, it is true, had been skilfully arranged. At a certain day and hour, and at a settled place, the Huguenot troops, under Guitry, were to arrive, and Alençon was to steal forth from Saint-Germain, and put himself under their guard. But there was, unfortunately, a blunder; Guitry arrived too early, with insufficient troops; Alençon, taken by surprise, remained half dazed and irresolute, and his confederate, the Comte de la Mole, seeing him thus vacillating, lost courage and confessed all to Catherine. She took fright and the Court fled precipitately to Vincennes. Here Alençon and Navarre were put under a kind of arrest and subjected to strict supervision. The disturbance might now have subsided, had they been content to lie quiet. But this was not in their natures; their restless ambitions remained unsatisfied. A fresh flight was projected—this time of both Princes—to be followed by a rebellion led by them. La Mole was again their accomplice, together with a Piedmontese, Count Annibale Coconnas—no very trustworthy agent.

These persons would not in any way be interesting figures had they not been touched with romance. For Coconnas was the lover of Marie, the Duchesse de Nevers (the sister of the young Duchesse de Guise), and La Mole of no less a Princess than Marguerite of Navarre. Two years of marriage had taught that lady experience, but not morals. Catherine, according to her daughter, had allowed her little chance of learning them, and had once more tried to sacrifice her to policy. Close upon the massacre, the Queen-Mother, anxious to keep well with the Catholics, had tried hard, said Margot, to unmarry her. But in this effort she had failed. The young wife's standard was, however, doubtless lowered, and the path of dalliance became pretty quickly known to her. The period of her connection with La Mole was an eventful time for her. It marked the birth of her great friendship with Alençon, which was to make, a few years later, such a chapter of political intrigue and to work such havoc at the Court. "At this season," run her memoirs, "my brother Alençon used every kind of stratagem and means to charm me, that I might vow friendship to him, as I had done to the King: for hitherto, seeing that he had always been bred outside the Court, we had hardly seen each other, and were not familiar together."

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How much she was in his counsels and in those of La Mole on this occasion, it is not easy to judge. She would certainly have been a more reliable colleague than her lover, and perhaps had she completely organized the scheme, the result would have been more satisfactory. As it was, the watchful Catherine discovered all. La Mole and Coconnas were imprisoned, and the Marshals of Montmorency and Cossé, also seriously suspected of complicity, were condemned to a semi-captivity. Only Condé, also implicated, escaped to Strasburg. The Queen-Mother lost no time in summoning Alençon, and had with him one of those dread interviews which made the victim tremble in remembering them. She knew that at whatever cost she must dissociate him from the rest, and must pretend to prove his innocence. "What have you done, my son," she asked as he came into her presence, "and will you kindly hasten to disavow all that has been planned in your name?" Alençon bent beneath her iron will, and wrote a solemn declaration of his ignorance of the whole affair. "We," it began, "son and brother of the King of France, having heard that some impostor has sown and spread false reports against us"—and the remainder followed suit. Navarre was the next to undergo the ordeal in the Queen-Mother's presence. More dramatic than his brother-in-law, "he wept most piteously, shedding hot tears over his innocence," and put his name to the same kind of statement. But he came off better than Alençon, for his wife had written his defence, a brilliantly effective document. To the lucidity of a lawyer she added the intuition of a woman. Her lover was in greater jeopardy than her husband, but she knew how to be the great lady and to keep up wifely decorum. "God lent me the grace," she wrote, "to draw up the paper so well that he (Navarre) was satisfied with it, and the Commissioners were astonished to see how excellently I had prepared it."

The King's illness had meanwhile been increasing. Lung disease had made rapid progress, and he was in a dangerous condition. This added fresh fuel to Catherine's wrath. With Anjou far away, Alençon's success might, at any moment, mean his usurpation of the throne. Thus, when the conspirators' rooms were searched and a wax image was found of the King, the face pierced with pins, superstitious fear was added to anger. That such an image must be fatal to the original was believed even among enlightened people. A strict investigation was made to discover the creator of the doll, and he proved to be no less a person than the Queen-

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Mother's favourite astrologer, Cosmo Ruggieri. He was well-known to the public—"a swarthy man, whose face is not well made, who plays on instruments, and sometimes wears stiff breeches, and sometimes stuff ones, and is always dressed in black. A very powerful person"—so he was described in La Mole's Trial. But La Mole cried out against the injustice of the charge against himself. The image, he declared, if properly inspected, would be found to be not that of the King at all, but of a woman—his own mistress, with two stabs in her heart.

Catherine did not credit this version; she was mortally afraid. "*Monsieur le Procureur*," she wrote to the *Procureur* of the Parlement, "I heard this evening that Cosmo said nothing at all. But it is a certain fact that he constructed the thing which my son Alençon had on his person, and I was told that he has made a waxen figure, the heart of which is pierced with pricks, and that this figure was found among La Mole's chattels; and that also in his lodging at Paris he has many evil possessions—books and papers and the like. Pray tell me everything that Cosmo may have confessed, and whether this image has been found. In case that is so, please arrange for me to see it."

Ruggieri himself believed in his mission, for we find the Queen-Mother writing later to the same official that, "No sooner was Cosmo taken, than he asked if the King vomited, if he still lost blood, and had pains in his head." "We must know," she adds, "the exact truth about the King's illness, but Cosmo must be forced to break the spell. If he has worked magic to make my son Alençon love La Mole, he must be forced to undo that charm also. Written at eleven at night: April 11." When magic is spoken of as matter of fact, it augurs ill for the standards of the day. La Mole's and Coconnas' Trial was typical of their time, but in this case the nature of the evidence hardly mattered, for the prisoners were certainly guilty. The affair could only end in one way. Alençon and Navarre could not be exposed, so it was the more needful that their two accomplices should be sacrificed, and both of them were condemned to death. But the Queen of Navarre was not going to let her lover die without risking something to save him. If she was not respectable, she was, at least, not self-preserving, and her swashbuckling adventurousness is touched with Renaissance romance. "Although," runs her story, "I stood so high in the good graces of the King that he loved no one in the world so well as me, I resolved to ruin

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my good fortune that I might save their lives. For seeing that I drove out in my coach and returned again with all freedom, and that the guards never looked inside, or made my women take off their masks, I planned to disguise one of the prisoners as a lady, and to take him out in my carriage." We have small doubt which man she meant to rescue, although she tells us that the plan was unsuccessful because they quarrelled as to which was to enjoy the privilege of escape. It may have been that Coconnas in anger threatened to betray La Mole's intentions. But, whatever the reason, the failure of the scheme was a fact, and the two men were duly beheaded.

After the execution, their heads were brought in secret to Marguerite and the Duchesse de Nevers; and the two Princesses embalmed them with sweet spices, curling their Court-fashioned hair, weeping plentiful tears and—in a few weeks—forgetting them.

Alençon and Navarre had got off with their lives, but not with their liberty. No more did the two Marshals, who were sent to close confinement in the Bastille. Its undue protraction—for nearly a year—and her designs to get them strangled, are among the worst accusations against Catherine. Matters went so far that they were both reported to be seriously ill, so that their death, when it came, might seem more natural. Montmorency did not deceive himself about his danger. "Tell the Queen-Mother," he said, "that I am well aware of what she meant to do with me. She need not use so much ceremony. Let her merely send the Apothecary of Monsieur the Chancellor, and I will take whatever he gives me." But the moment was not opportune for the murder; the apothecary was not sent, and, in due time, the prisoners were released.

The King was now evidently dying, and the plot of his brother and Navarre was the last straw that broke him. "If they had at least waited for my death! But this shows too much of ill-will"—so he had said bitterly at Saint-Germain. He was consumed by fever—the fever of consumption. The disease in his lungs, said Paré, "had been brought on by excessive use of his hunting-horn," acting, doubtless, on a worn-out constitution. An utter apathy had fallen upon him, and he lay inaccessible to all, wrapped in a pall of melancholy which music alone had power to stir. He took no note of what was passing. One day, his mother came to him, her face full of joy. The Protestants, she told him, had been defeated in Normandy, and the great Huguenot, Montgoméry, had been

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taken ; his execution was imminent—their arch-foe would soon be no more. But Charles, like the King of Israel, only turned his face to the wall and said nothing. His thoughts were fixed upon the Huguenots, but not in the way that Catherine dreamed.

There was one person whose presence did not perturb him, and that was his faithful little wife. Her love, so impotent in his life-time, seemed to help him towards the close. "I remember" (Brantôme's favourite beginning) "that when he lay in his bed, and she came to visit him, on a sudden she sat down near him, not near the head of his bed, as is usual, but a little apart, within view of him, where she stayed hardly saying a word. But the whole time she gazed at him so fixedly that you would have said that she clasped him close inside her heart. And then she would be seen to let some tears fall, so tenderly and secretly that any one who was not watching carefully would perceive nothing, for when she wiped her wet eyes, she pretended to be using her handkerchief for her nose." Charles must have been touched at the grief of one one who had given so much and had had so little in return. And yet, at the end, it was Marie Touchet for whose love he called.

Now and then he had whimsical desires. He sent for one of the crowns that encircled the *Châsse* of Sainte Geneviève, and begged his confessor, Sorbin, to say Sainte Geneviève's prayer in his presence. Perhaps he was possessed by some vague idea that he might appease the patron Saint of Paris for the havoc he had wrought in her city. Soon after, Catherine entered with some nobles who asked him to confer the Regency upon her for the time being. To this he assented and, on May 29, he sent orders to the provincial governments to obey her during his illness.

That same day was a long one. All through it he was haunted by visions of blood and floating corpses. He was tended by the old nurse whom he loved, and whose life he had saved. Her compulsory Catholicism had been fictitious and, after the massacre, she had returned to her Huguenot faith. "Ah, *Nourrice!*" he said to her now, his eyes staring at space—"What blood and what murders! Ah, what an evil counsel was given me! Oh, my God, forgive me all that, and have mercy upon me! I know not where I am, so bewildered and disturbed doth He make me. What will become of this country, and what will become of me, into whose hands God commended it? I am lost! Full well I know it." But the old

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woman comforted her charge. "May the murders and the bloodshed be upon the head of those who compelled you to them, and upon your evil counsellors!" she cried. The next day, May 30, he concluded all that was necessary. He published a document declaring his mother's right to the Regency, and also that of Anjou as the next heir to the throne. After this he remained long speechless, then suddenly he turned over, like one just awakened. "Call my brother," he said. Catherine sent for Alençon, but when the King saw him he lay down again in his old position. "Let my brother be fetched," he repeated. "But here he is," replied his mother. "No, Madam, I want the King of Navarre—it is *he* who is my brother." Navarre was summoned, and came reluctantly, full of fears as to his personal safety and only anxious to get away again. His nervousness was perhaps excusable, for Catherine had given orders that he was to be brought to the King's room through the "Vault" where the arquebusiers were stationed. His late doings had made her anxious to give him a caution, and in spite of her assurance that he need not fear, Navarre was not slow to grasp her meaning. He was taken up a secret staircase to the royal bedchamber. When he saw him, Charles stretched out his arms.

The impressionable Navarre burst into tears and fell on his knees at the foot of the bed. Charles embraced him closely. "Brother, you are losing a good friend," he said—"Had I believed all that I was told, you would not be alive. But I always loved you. Do not trust. . . ." "Sire," broke in Catherine, "do not say that!" "Madam, I do say it, it is the truth. Believe me, brother, and love me. I trust in you alone to look after my wife and daughter. Pray God for me. Farewell! I rejoice that I leave no male child to wear the Crown after me."—these were the last words he uttered.

So died Charles IX, on May 30, 1574, a month before his twenty-fourth birthday.

Tout son règne ne fut qu'un horrible carnage.
Et mourut enfermé comme un chien qui enrage.

Ran his "*Tombeau*," published two weeks later. But some thing else remains to be said. He was more sinned against than sinning.

CHAPTER XII

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THE mode of Henri III's accession was as whimsical as it was ignominious. Strange to say, his six months' rule had been a great success among his Polish subjects, and although half of them were Lutherans, they regarded him with unreasoning admiration. But nothing diminished his dislike of being away from France and the Princesse de Condé. "I love her so greatly, as you know," he wrote to Nançay (the Captain of the French King's Guards), "that you must really tell me all that befalls her, for the sake of the tears that I weep for her. But I will speak no more of her, for love is intoxicated." He fooled away his time in sending her fantastic letters, written in his own royal blood which he drew from his finger ; and in giving gorgeous masques and pageants which were doubtless the cause of his popularity. As for his duties as a monarch, he used to feign illness to avoid them.

On the night of June 14, there had been a great State ball which had kept him up all night. He danced as his brother hunted—for hours on end, for the pure pleasure of the motion. Early the next day, arrived an Ambassador from his Suzerain, the Emperor Maximilian ; this envoy forced the door of his bedchamber. He brought the tidings of Charles IX's death, learned from Catherine's messengers as they passed through Vienna on their way to Poland. Maximilian had lost no time, and had despatched a special *courrier* who had outstripped the slower ones from France. These arrived shortly afterwards and handed Catherine's letter to her son. He did not attempt to show fraternal sorrow. His only feeling was one of anxiety to start at once for his own country. The wisest of his counsellors urged that a step such as he wished to take would be regarded as dishonourable flight and a disgrace to his name. Unfortunately his favourite, Villequier, a courtly scamp of no better judgment

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than morals, had more weight with him, and he pressed for instant departure. It was, he said, the only way to save France from the Huguenots, who would otherwise take advantage of the interregnum and usurp power in the country. There was much debate, first with one, then with the others. The Poles, Henri well knew, were bent upon keeping him as their sovereign. But his own mind was made up, although he did not show his cards and contrived to deceive those around him. In the presence of Tenczynski, one of the chief nobles of the Polish Court, the Prince allowed himself to be undressed. "He got into bed, and all the time he went on talking. Then, little by little, his words grew fewer, his eyelids fell to, and he seemed to be fast asleep." Tenczynski left the room. His Majesty was unwatched. Directly afterwards, two of his French followers entered, booted. Henri threw himself into his clothes, leaped upon his horse, and rode off, not forgetting to take the priceless Crown jewels of Poland with him. Spurred by the fear of pursuit, they took a reckless course, and when they reached the banks of the Vistula they were ignorant in what direction it flowed. "The King dismounted and plunged a stick into the water." Consternation was the result. To follow the stream they found would only bring them back to Cracow; they had nothing for it but to start again towards an opposite goal. But direction, whatever happened, they must have. As they galloped onwards through a forest, they came to a woodcutter's hut, and, staving in the closed door, compelled its inmate, their swords at his throat, to pledge himself to serve as their guide. Thus accompanied, and after seventy-two hours' journey, they got as far as the frontier, and there the King's panting horse dropped down dead under him.

The whole business reads like play-acting, with a good deal of posing for the gallery—especially in the woodcutter episode. The needlessness of the flight, considering the inability of Poland to withhold the French king from France—the sudden scare that overcame him lest some unknown chance might keep him from his pleasure—are only further proofs of the neurotic nature of this will-less Valois Prince, who knew that he could not act at all unless he acted precipitately.

In Cracow, meanwhile, Henri's escape had been discovered. Tenczynski had gone to his door and, having knocked in vain, forced it open. The bird was flown. Upon the table

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four torches were burning, and on either side of the bed, with its closed curtains, the pages on duty stood immovable. Tenczynski drew the hangings apart—the bed was empty. He gave the alarm at once. Every bell in the city was set clanging. The news made Henri's subjects furious; they resolved to have him back at all costs. Tenczynski, with a hundred Tartars, set out in hot pursuit of the runaway. Breathless and exhausted, they caught him up on the frontier. "Sire," said Tenczynski, "return to Poland, pray return! You will find us as obedient as heretofore; return, I implore you!" "Count," replied Henri, "in going to take the French Crown, my birthright, I do not renounce the other. Directly I have fulfilled my duty as a King, you will see me again." "Sire, in France you will not find subjects as faithful as your Poles." "Do not insist, Tenczynski. . . . Go back to Cracow and keep guard over all those whom I have left behind—I trust in you."

Tenczynski answered no word, but pricking his arm with his dagger, he took off a bracelet, flecked with his blood, and romantically handed it to Henri. "Accept this, Sire," he said, "and in return let me have one of your rings." With a royal grace, Henri gave him a diamond ring from his finger. "Keep it in remembrance of me," he ended, and the generous Polish Count, half knight and half barbarian, rode away, not to see him more. The King was well aware that he could not return, in spite of his fine-sounding speeches. Perhaps Tenczynski's chivalrous grief would have been less, had he known of the Polish jewels that his ideal monarch had purloined.

Once free of the country that he hated, he made no haste to return to his own. He lingered at Vienna; he lingered in Venice, where he had a magnificent reception. As he approached the city, three gondolas met him, one tented with black velvet, one with violet, one with gold. He characteristically chose the golden boat and had it uncovered that he might be better seen by the populace. It was rowed by eight gondoliers with Turkish turbans on their heads, and a whole flotilla followed him into the open lagoon. We have a picture natural to Venice—shimmering waters, shining satins, jewelled Princes, all the pageant of earthly dominion. When the King was half-way to Murano, he was met by forty of its courteous young nobles who gave him welcome from Venice, and at sundown he landed.

Like the rest of his family, Henri III, the ignoblest of them

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all, had the true taste of an æsthete and also the true dramatic instinct. No sooner had he arrived at the Foscari Palace than he withdrew to his apartments; but instead of preparing for the banquet, he changed his State clothes to a sombre suit and stole down the palace staircase into the garden, at the end of which a gondola was moored. Here the Duke of Ferrara was awaiting him, and together they floated away to the Grand Canal, where, like many travellers since, they glided about for hours, the King asking the Duke the names of the palaces that lined it. But while they were playing at romance, Henri's exasperated hosts were sitting round a supper-table, laid for sixty guests, which had been prepared for him at fabulous expense. At last, unable to endure the tedium longer, they retired; and when he returned very late, he ordered the simplest meal and went to bed. Other nights, and more gorgeous, were to follow. Sometimes he would stand leaning against his Palazzo looking now up, now down the Canal at the illuminated city. From the windows opposite, everywhere, Venetian ladies waved handkerchiefs, threw him flowers. "If but my Queen-Mother were here!" he exclaimed more effectively than sincerely—"She would then take her share of these my honours which I owe to her alone."

Sometimes he would wander forth at night like Haroun Alraschid, and roam at his will, paying visits to ladies too well known in Venice, and chiefly to Veronica Franco, loved by Titian—a lady who wrote sonnets and was no better than she should be. One of her sonnets is about her surprise at receiving a call from the French monarch. He probably answered it in kind.

He liked to make verses and to haunt artists. He stood to Tintoret who sketched him, dressed as a sailor upon the *Bucentaur*, the vessel of the State. He went to see Paolo Veronese, then in the prime of life. And he frequented other kinds of society. Dressed in plain black without jewels, he would stroll *incognito* in the Rialto. "Here he went from one shop to another, buying musk at unimagined prices from the famous perfumer, at the Sign of the Lily, or gold charms and a pearl necklace at the very wealthy jeweller, Fugger; or he would pay a visit to the Fuggieri, the money-lenders of Emperors and Popes. Then home again, whence he set out once more upon the *Bucentaur*, and, duly robed, was present at a session of the Senate, to take part in the voting . . . and put in a golden ball in favour of Giacomo Contarini."

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But despatches came pressing him to return to France. "I implored of him," said a wise counsellor, "to enter his kingdom . . . to show himself no longer the boon-companion, but the master—to disentangle himself from all the liars, so that none might remember that he was young." And, once in France, he must "regulate all things himself—secretaries, despatches, place-hunters; if he wants a little more time in bed he must not lose the extra hour that he wastes there—he must have State papers read to him. And he must begin these good habits directly he arrives, for if he does not practise them directly he will never do so at all." These counsels must have fallen chilly upon the ear of a masquerader who had always done as he liked. But in the end he had to listen. He had put off as long as he could the moment when his head would lie uneasy, but he could not reject the Crown of France.

Even in travelling homewards he played the dastard, making over his possessions in Savoy (excepting Saluces) to the Duke of that domain; receiving Damville, the Maréchal de Montmorency's brother, like a dear friend, while all the time he was unsuccessfully plotting to kill him. Near the frontier the King was met by Alençon and Navarre, fresh from their confinement at Vincennes. They had started practically prisoners. Catherine treated them like naughty boys, always keeping them with her in her coach and in her lodgings; but with the King's coming they were released. There was a State Entry into Lyons, where the Queen-Mother appeared in public with her well-loved son, who had now fulfilled her cherished ambition. The rejoicings, the pageants, were as sumptuous as they always were in that Southern city. But State functions are not distinctive, and one show was much like another. A single individual glimpse we get of Catherine, as she majestically went through her duties in the town. It is a glimpse worth having, because it shows her more human than usual. She was visiting the studio of Corneille de Lyon, the great portrait painter, whose master-hand had drawn so many personages of the Court. Their pictures were hung here and there round the room, and Catherine was looking about her, when in the midst of them she caught sight of her own face and figure as she had been many years ago. She saw herself "habited in French fashion in a little cap wreathed with great pearls, and a dress with large sleeves of silver tissue, lined with lynx. Nothing was wanting but speech. Her three goodly daughters stood near her. In the

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which sight she took exceeding pleasure, and all the company there present amused themselves with watching her admire and praise her own beauty above that of all the others. She herself was so ravished by the contemplation thereof that she could not take her eyes off it until the Duc de Nemours came to speak to her. 'Madam,' he said, 'that is, I think, a very good portrait—there is nothing to be urged against it, and your daughters, meseemeth, do you great honour, for they neither walk in front of you nor surpass you.' And she answered, 'I believe, Cousin, you well remember the time and age and fashion of this picture, and you can judge better than any of this company, you who have seen me thus, if I was thought what you say and if I have been as I am here.' There is at least as much of pathos as fatuity in Catherine's self-appreciation. Memories, more bitter than sweet, of days when she tried to shine in vain—thoughts of her husband and of Diane de Poitiers must have surged within her as she stood there entranced. Common women would have probably turned away self-disillusioned, but Catherine was a Queen surrounded by courtiers, and she went off royally convinced that there had been no fault in her person. Yet the picture had meant more to her than that: it had linked the past with the present.

The present claimed her attention, and private tragedy dimmed the new King's festivities. News reached Lyons that the Princesse de Condé had died suddenly, some said poisoned. Catherine, who first heard the tidings, did not dare give her son the letter containing them, but laid it with many others which were strewn upon his writing-table. It caught his eye—he opened it—and instantly fell down in a dead faint, from which it took long to recover him. A fever followed which kept him in his bed, and he seemed to have no strength to rally. "Does he not wear something of hers?" she asked one of his gentlemen. "In sooth," he answered, "I have seen him with a cross round his neck, and with earrings, too, that came from her." "Then please contrive that he shall wear them no longer," was the Queen-Mother's order. But she did not succeed in curing his grief—the only feature of his life that does him credit. Some time after, when he was in Paris, the Cardinal de Bourbon asked him to go into the vaults of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, in which, for the time being, the coffin of the Princess was laid. "As long as her heart is there," said Henri, "I will not enter the place."

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The sincerity of his sorrow did not prevent its being theatrical. He had been two months at Lyons when he moved to Avignon ("*cette fâcheuse ville*," Catherine called it), where he gave himself over to every ascetic extravagance. He joined the new-fangled Brotherhood of the *Battus*, decadents in religion, whose main occupation was to thrash each other, dressed in sacks and wearing masks as if they were the Brothers of Mercy. The King, a dandy in woe, had death's-heads blazoned all over his clothes, even upon his shoe-strings. He walked at night in torchlight processions, in the hope that he would thus impress his people, who were not inclined to take him seriously. Perhaps it was the same desire that induced Navarre, who had not even the excuse of unhinged nerves, to beg that he might also join the Order. Henri III consented. "But," he added with a fatuous smile, "you are not in any way made for it; you have not got the vocation."

These devotional freaks had one result—they killed the old Cardinal de Lorraine. Anxious not to be behindhand in the pious shows, he walked one night with the rest, with a crucifix in his hand, his feet half-bared, his shoulders uncovered. He was growing an old man. Not unnaturally he caught a chill which caused his death.

On the night he died, there was a tempest. The Catholics declared that it was the wrath of God which came to take away the Cardinal from a nation that did not deserve him. The Huguenots said that the witches were holding their Sabbath and had arrived in the storm to bear his soul away. He died "in great trouble and disturbance of spirit, most horribly calling upon devils as he drew his last breath." In spite of which the Jesuits published a "Discourse" on his beautiful end, "the which made him talk like an angel." But few can have believed it, and there were none to pity his misery. So died "*le tigre de la France*," the "*Sangsue ennemie de Dieu*," the scourge of the people, the firebrand of the Court, loved of none, least of all by his allies. "From the hour of his death," said a contemporary, "no one spoke of the Cardinal de Lorraine any more than if he had never existed. And less stir was made about him at Court than if he had been a simple village curé or notary."

Catherine herself had lost her chief, her hated accomplice. Her strange power of seeing visions once again possessed her. On the day of his death, she had just sat down to dinner: "Now we shall have peace," she said, "the Cardinal de

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Lorraine is dead, and he, folk say, was the one person that prevented it." "And yet," she ended, recollecting that prudence was needful, "I really cannot believe this. He was a great prelate and a wise one, and France—and ourselves also—have suffered a grievous loss in his death." But her little *oraison funèbre* exhausted even her powers of dissimulation. "To-day," she added below her breath, "has died the wickedest of men." As she spoke she was about to raise her glass to her lips, but on a sudden she began to tremble, and the glass almost fell from her hand. "Jésus!" she cried out, "there is Monsieur le Cardinal! I see him, I see him before me!" In a moment, she had pulled herself together. "In sooth there was good cause for fear," she said coolly—"I am much deceived if I did not see the *bonhomme* pass in front of me on his way to Paradise. It seemed to me that I beheld him soaring thither." Her fright did not pass. She had terrors in the night, her ladies reported, and "complained that she oftentimes saw him and could not chase him from her imagination."

Henri now decided to be crowned at Rheims, but his journey there was not a glorious one. The Huguenots beset his steps with insults. The citizens of a town on the road which was being besieged by his army cursed him and Catherine as they passed. "*Hau massacreurs!*" they shouted. "You will not murder *us* in our beds as you did the Admiral. Bring your tricked-out favourites and their perfumes here to see our women. They will soon find out whether or no these defenders of ours are an easy prey." The women of the place were at that moment working in the trenches with pikes and pistols, and one old crone was seen at her distaff on the ramparts, spinning in the thick of an assault.

The Huguenots were gaining in assurance. Those in the South were in revolt, and Aigues-Morte fell into their hands. They now had Damville for their leader and their prospects had considerably brightened. Catherine was alarmed and, when they sent a deputation to her, she tried to beguile it with fair words. "I know that your dear Huguenots are cats," she said, "and will always find their feet again. . . . And yet I will do my utmost for them (as I always have done), provided they will believe me and be reasonable." Her words were confident, but her heart was full of misgivings, and she saw no course open but war. The King talked big, and did nothing. He had plenty of troops at his command, but

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in order to gain success, he would have had to lead them in person, and this he would not do. His youthful love of military glory, the one robust ambition he had, had passed, destroyed by the fumes of decadence, and he now longed for nothing but his ease in the midst of his favourites. Nor had he more wisdom than courage. On his journey homewards, both the Emperor and the Doge had counselled tolerance as his best policy. Even Monluc now followed the same tack. It would have made peace fairly easy, for the Protestant demands were not exacting. They asked him to grant them equality of worship and position, to summon the States-General, and to remove the Italians who surrounded him. But he remained blinded by obstinate self-will. The result was the closer alliance of the Huguenots with the Moderate "*Catholiques unis*,"¹ who, in December, 1574, together held a council at Nîmes—a kind of Republican Federation, at which both religions figured on an equal footing.

It lasted but a short time and ended with the opening of the New Year. In February Henri III was crowned at Rheims. The omens at the function were not happy. "When they set the Crown upon his brow, he said aloud that it hurt him, and twice it almost slipped from his head. The next day but one, the world was electrified by his sudden marriage. His wedding, like all else pertaining to him, was a freak of his nerves. He had shortly before taken a fancy to Louise de Vaudemont, a pious, fair-haired girl of the family of Lorraine, the Cardinal's cousin and the daughter of the sister of Egmont. Now he made her his wife. The whole affair was so unexpected that there was no time to collect the "money-gifts" from his subjects that were usual upon these occasions. And he was bent upon such magnificence that he defied all the customs of the Church and insisted upon having the wedding Mass at night, that his day might be free "for the adjusting of jewels" and "the composing" of his own dress and his bride's—an innovation which caused grave scandal to serious people. But there was no romance in all this impetuous magnificence. There was, instead, a touch of cynicism. His bride had not been without experiences—she had had, as he knew, a love-affair with Messire François de Luxembourg. This gentleman, who had come to attend the coronation and the wedding, was summoned by the King to appear before

¹ This term covered much the same field as the term *Politiques*.

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him. " 'Cousin,' he began, 'I have married your mistress, but, in exchange, I want you to marry mine' (by which he meant Mademoiselle de Châteauneuf). Luxembourg answered that 'he was very glad that his mistress had come in for so much happiness and greatness . . . but that he begged His Majesty to excuse him from marrying Châteauneuf just yet and to give him time to think the matter over.' To which the King rejoined that he willed and desired him to marry her immediately. Whereupon Luxembourg, feeling himself sore pressed, entreated the King most humbly to have patience with him for a week. The which space the King having diminished to three days only, Luxembourg mounted upon his horse and retired from the Court with all diligence." Henri did not pursue the matter ; he was too much absorbed in shows and follies.

It may, indeed, he said that his "*sacre*" at Rheims was a kind of overture to his reign and struck the keynote of his future. On the one hand, grotesque irresponsibility and, puerile magnificence ; on the other, the plottings of Alençon, who met his brother here and at once began conspiring against him, though he was not slow to deny the charge.

At last, on February 27, the King made his entry into Paris. He began life there by resuming the religious excesses of Avignon and arranging fantastic processions. But these pieties did not affect his conduct. Before much time had elapsed, he was wringing large sums from his subjects to pay for the pageants that he ordered and also for the vast amounts that he gave to his favourite de Guast. De Guast had a comfortable time, for gold had been preceded by fat bishoprics, in which he could drive a thrifty traffic. He sold one of them, the Bishopric of Amiens, to a business-like lady of ill-repute, who in her turn sold it with a profit. And yet at this time the Court was so poor that the pages had to go without cloaks, because they had been obliged to pawn them to pay for their travelling expenses ; while had it not been for a certain rich gentleman, Le Comte, who lent Catherine five thousand crowns, she would not have had any money to pay the wages of her ladies-in-waiting. The opening of the new reign did not tend to edification.

How could it be so when a knave and a coward sat on the throne ? Henri was barely twenty-four, yet few can have dared to hope that he might change. The power to develop had left him ; there were no springs to refresh his arid nature.



HENRI III EN 1585

BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE.

ANONYME.

From a photograph by A. Giraudon

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Every one seems to have agreed about him, and the portraits that we get from the various Ambassadors' despatches are all of a piece. The picture is not prepossessing, whether of the inward or the outward man. "He was above middle-height—rather slender than well-proportioned. His face was elongated, with the under-lip and the chin a little underhung, like his mother's." His forehead was broad, "his complexion more white than pale," his eyes alone "fine and gentle." "His whole person made a delicate impression," and the ear-rings that he always wore enhanced his southern look. "He had intelligence, even good sense. But the ardour of his years," "the vivacity of a Frenchman," were not his. He had not the health for such qualities. "Exercise must never fatigue him—for which reason he did not hunt or ride—and his pleasures must never be exhausting." He indulged in what Correro calls "*une chasse de palais*," which meant "a gallant running after ladies." But as "a few minutes of being in love" made him take to his bed for three days, he must have grown self-preserving in this respect. Before he was thirty-six his hair was white and he had lost all his teeth; it was not so much that he looked aged, but his youth was old and dead. Yet he never drank anything but water, or wore himself by fits of agitation, as his brother had done. His manner had, as we know, "a *je ne sais quoi* of the solemn" which came to him by nature. At first sight he appeared to be haughty, "but if you came closer to him, you would find him more courteous and easy than other folk." Yet "this love of a soft and peaceable life made him lose greatly in his people's opinion, and together with the wide-spread view that he was not long-lived, did much to weaken his authority."

There are contemporary stories about him, insignificant perhaps, yet they bring before us more vividly than any description the aimless degeneracy of the man. He made no secret of his ingloriousness. "One day, the King of Navarre, being then in the chamber of his aunt, a great Court-lady, took pleasure in watching a gentleman named Noailles touch the lute. Rumour had it that this same gentleman loved and was beloved by Madame la Princesse, and he most melodiously attuned his voice to the instrument, singing this song—

Je ne vois rien qui me contente
Absent de ta divinité.

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But since he rather often repeated this word 'divinity,' with his eye always fixed upon the Princess, the King of Navarre began laughing with a very good grace, and looking at his aunt on the one side, and at Noailles on the other—

N'appellez pas ainsi ma tante
Elle aime trop l'humanité.

Quoth he. But the King of France having heard that same day of this retort, had much delight in it. 'Here is repartee that is worthy of my brother,' he said—'I wish that he and the rest would seek amusement only in this fashion; then we should soon have peace.'" Tavannes was right when he asserted that "the position of a private person with £10,000 a year was the King's real idea of happiness."

Such, surrounded by his lap-dogs and his *Mignons*, diamonds in his ears, little in his mind, was Henri III, the last of the Valois monarchs.

CHAPTER XIII

Paris

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Paris

THE Paris of 1575 was almost as motley and as shifting, as irreverent and fanatical, as strange a medley of splendour and of squalor, as the character of the King who ruled it. When Charles V was asked what was the finest town in France, he answered—"Orleans . . . Paris is not a town, it is a little world." And a world that cannot be revived ; yet who can help wishing to revive it, or to echo the old song ?

Réveille-toi, Pasquil, grand prophète des hommes
. . . Enfile tes deux côtés, reprends ta liberté,
Pour chanter les secrets du siècle auquel nous sommes.

And we must be grateful if now and then, for one moment, Pasquil consents to lift the curtain.

The city contained, even then, a million of inhabitants, a vast shifting population, the poorer classes—labourers, thieves and bravi—continually flitting from one spot to another. The palaces and big Hôtels were put to strange uses. Their owners, for a good part of the year, were away with the Court, or elsewhere ; and during their absence the concierges-in-charge made a practice of letting their masters' abodes on their own account. "The Farmers of the palaces" they were nicknamed, and they found their profession most repaying. Its only drawback was one for the tenants. Such houses could obviously not be had excepting on the shortest leases—by the day or the month—in case of their proprietors' return. If their lords came back, it meant instant flight. Yet such was the scarcity of mansions that even great personages availed themselves of this ignominious swindling, and the Papal Nuncio, Salviati, himself "was forced . . . to move three times in two months." As for the lesser dwellings of the better sort, they were smaller and more comfortable than in Italy, and hung with straw mats inside, a protection against wind and

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rain. They stood huddled together ; indeed, there was but little open space in Paris. Even the public squares were occupied by wooden sheds, erected by the poorest people for themselves. The only large free place was the horse-market, where, every Saturday, one to two thousand horses were sold. But in 1578, that, too, was being built over. And in the midst of this throng of the houses, tall and narrow, with their peaked roofs of grey slate ; entangled, as it were, in the bewildering skein of serpentine alleys, ill-paved and dark ; encircled by mud and squalor indescribable, rose the churches and the great Hôtels and palaces—the Louvre and the still unfinished Tuileries—set in stiff green gardens and pleached alleys. They might have stood as an allegory of the gross habits and base taste, protected by the stately etiquette which lent delusive glamour to the whole.

On the Ile de France stood, as now, the guardian towers of Notre Dame, and near it the Palais de Justice which served as the Exchange of the city. " From morning to evening its walls were filled with a hustling throng of lawyers and litigants, merchants, bankers, agents of all sorts ; there were men of affairs, too, with a gay crowd of gentlemen and ladies, some bent on business, more on pleasure, among them often the King and his Court, who came to seek amusement in the place. It served the purposes of a club and public playground, and over a thousand crowns a day were spent upon tennis alone."

A police well organized, but lax in practice, kept guard over the city. In all the big streets there were sentry-boxes, in which the police-sergeants had their abode. And their duties were shared by the Watch and by the Commissioners for each parish. " These," says a contemporary critic, " go prancing about the town every night, making so great a clatter that they give all the malefactors the signal and the leisure to run away." Had, however, the constabulary been active, the prisons would have overflowed.

In some ways Paris then was Paris now. It was already a city of Restaurants. " Do you wish your provisions ready for you, whether cooked or raw ? " asks a contemporary—" In less than an hour, the *Rôtisseurs* and *Pâtissiers* will arrange for you a dinner, a supper, for six—for twenty—for a hundred. The *Rôtisseur* will give you meat, the *Pâtissier* pasties, tarts, sweets and entrées ; the cook will provide you with jellies, sauces, ragoûts. This art is so well advanced in Paris that there are now tavern-keepers who will serve you dinners in

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their houses at all prices. . . . The Princes, the King himself, sometimes frequent them."

Royalty ate five times a day, "without any rule or fixed hour." Its fare consisted "mostly of meat, together with a little bread or fruit." It was very fond of pastry too, and the traveling Court found appetizing pastry-cooks even in the country villages. This was a time of good digestion and no conscience. The Pope granted easy dispensations from fasting and allowed luxuries throughout Lent. Perhaps "*les poires de bon Chrétien*" (supposed to keep sound all the winter) got their name from the pious fasters who indulged in this agreeable form of discipline. The poor, when they ate meat, ate pork, but "artizans, and tradesmen, in however small a way," made for better fare—"venison, partridges and mutton, salmon and salted herrings."

Such facts look like prosperity, but they are deceptive. Some sorts of food were plentiful and cheap, but other means to live were wanting. The poverty in these years was appalling. The citizens had had no chance to recover the past. While they were still prostrate from the long years of civil war, while trade languished and famine and sickness followed hard upon the heels of battle, the great Massacre descended upon them, sapping the springs of vitality and destroying the prosperous mercantile class, who, as we know, were mostly Huguenots. Then came the accession of Henri, a fop and a protector of favourites, who had little in his purse and little to hope from his treasury. Yet in spite of his penury, the Court, when it rested at Poitiers, included nearly 8,000 persons, not to speak of chance goers and comers, or of the 6,000 horses that they used. It is not [surprising that the people bled for it, that the citizens of Paris came off badly.

As for the country-folk, their plight was well-nigh intolerable. The abnormal cold of two summers had been followed, in 1574, by disease in the wheat. The price of bread was extortionate, and the unfairness of the civic authorities who distributed the loaves in country towns greatly increased the distress. A plague of wolves—one result of the massacres—infested the Provinces, and so did the pest. In the general disorganization, also, lepers were allowed to roam about unhindered, spreading their terrible malady. Fierce epidemics were abroad, and often the only doctors within reach were village barbers, or "wise women." There was no security anywhere, and the straggling warfare which continued

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there is no lady of bad fame who has not some objection to make to the morals of her neighbour. . . . Their manners and talk are most agreeable. But one fault they have—and that is avarice."

The picture is not altogether pleasing. We get a worse one if we go into the convents. There were many good nuns, "for," writes Lippomano, one of the Venetian envoys, "the 'Religious,' in France as elsewhere, are divided into two sorts, the rich and the poor." The poor sometimes led saintly lives: the rich were "more free-and-easy, less respectful of their abbesses' authority. They did as they liked and went out and came in as they pleased."

In the world, as in the nunnery, strict ceremony was a cloak for licence. Nothing could have been more elaborate than the forms which then attended a marriage. First there were "*les accords*," when the pair gave one another their hands in the presence of their parents. Next the *fiançailles*, when parents, bride and bridegroom went, at evening, to the parish authorities to ask the curé to publish the bans. Lastly came the *Epousailles* in the Church, and the bridegroom was not allowed to enter before he had given a heavy alms. The people had more practical arrangements. They had a dinner after the wedding, to which they frankly invited the friends and relatives who could give them most. When they sat down to table, water was handed round, and with it a large bowl or two in which every guest was obliged to deposit a sum of money, or a handsome gift. "Putting the guests under contribution," an eye-witness calls the custom. Just before the table was cleared the useful rite was repeated, so that the newly-married couple were sure of a neat little nest-egg. The gay cynicism and common sense of such arrangements were, perhaps, indigenous to France.

Frenchmen took diversion where they could find it. The daily passengers in the streets must have had an amusing time. If there was no regular theatre, the people made a drama out of common life. The walls were placarded with squibs and lampoons; a brawl ending in murder was no uncommon occurrence; vendetta was an unwritten law. Added to this, there were the pageants and processions, now of the Court, now of the Church, which enlivened the town with a blaze of colour—one of the reasons, perhaps, that reconciled it to kingly follies. These functions took the place of the play in a stricter sense than other distractions, and any fast-day which brought

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Royalty to Mass on foot was as good as an exciting comedy to the spectacle-loving populace. These shows were varied by others, as fantastic and no less frivolous, in spite of their seeming: strange Brotherhoods and Congregations—monks and flagellants—unrestrained and haggard, filing through the winding alleys and chanting penitential psalms.

The preachers, too, were almost considered as popular entertainers. They were personal and frank of tongue, and they sometimes preached for three or four hours. Their imprudence of speech was surprising. One of the best known among them, Frère Maurice Poncet, was occupying the pulpit of Saint Sulpice. "Every day," he said, "I hear cried in the streets the King's Edict of Pacification, made on behalf of them who hold the New Opinion. . . . But, for my part, I declare that if I were a Huguenot I would not trust it in the least. Those who have framed it have about as much soul as mules."

There was a still more fashionable preacher, a Gascon, one Frère Bernard of the Feuillants' Order, a young man of about twenty-one, "living an austere and saintly life, and *disant bien jusqu'à miracle*": "the which was so agreeable to the ladies of Paris" that they crowded to hear him and overwhelmed him with gifts. These oftenest took the form of pots of jam which must have been Frère Bernard's weakness. The moral of the story is a pointed one. "They changed his austerity into daintiness," and the town wits made capital of the fact. His adorers, it was said, had ended by giving him "*l'appétit de la chaire*(e)."

As for the Church dignitaries, their doings do not bear too much looking into. "The prelates in France," writes an Italian, "are not much respected; every man of them thinks only of living." Their travesties of sacred ceremonies, their buffooneries, their puerilities, are neither picturesque nor informing. There is, however, no need to dwell upon them. "The folly that men do lives after them," and it is only the signally bad or the signally good whose doings are remembered. Happily there is somewhere, in every age, a residue of modest, pious folk, who, no matter what their creed, live quiet, beneficent lives, and, being temperate, die unrecorded. These existed in France, we may be sure, at the close of the sixteenth century, both among the clergy and the laity. There were priests who consoled the suffering and oppressed—there were neighbours who loved others as themselves. Paris itself probably contained

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the ten righteous men that saved the city, for the springs of human kindness never quite dry up, or cease to keep the soul alive. But for the courtiers' religion, there was little to be said. Even when they were not actually bad, they turned religion into a Court intrigue. "*Ce grand personnage, Monsieur St. Paul,*" writes Brantôme, and he strikes the keynote of the faith of high-born circles: exclusive, artificial, and divided from conduct and natural life. Their "First Person" was of the highest rank, and He carefully observed the proper distinctions: between Saints and Angels above; between Kings, Nobles, people, below. The commoners were the farthest off Him, the Kings, whatever their lives, were nearest to His favour. St. Paul could have effected nothing, had he not been a "*grand personnage.*" As for Catherine herself, even then she was accused of atheism. A certain blind priest who was burnt on the score of free-thinking, confessed before the chief authorities that she was "the first upon the list of all his legion, to wit that of which he was Colonel-General in the absence of Satan." The story need not be taken too precisely. But it proves the estimation in which she was held. Nor does it overshoot the mark. Catherine was, indeed, an atheist—not in the old sense of the word, but in the only one that has reality. Hers was the atheism of indifference.

There were other popular guides besides the priests. No one who attempts to evoke the Paris of that generation can afford to dispense with the magicians. Alchemists and necromancers were as seriously and as often consulted as the doctors of to-day. The number in France was surprising. An old Diarist puts it at many thousands, basing his statement on the confession of a "Sorcerer" in 1572; but, though his figures cannot be accepted, they show the truth that they exaggerate—the prevalence of these persons in the country. Such prophets and purveyors of superstition, sincerely believing in their powers, are generally immanent in times of degeneracy and egoism, when sensation and emotion invade life and men delight to talk of themselves; times, too, when real faith having disappeared, there is no true touchstone for religion, and the world falls an easy prey to pseudo-creeds and striking versions of the supernatural. Nostradamus and Ruggieri, when prosperous, probably enjoyed the position of fashionable clergymen and doctors in one—with a touch of the successful actor added. The drawback of their craft lay in its precariousness, so much greater than that of the medical or clerical

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professions. At one moment, they might amass a fortune ; at another, topple headlong from their heights. Much depended on the nature of their prophecies. The Queen-Mother, having sent for such an one, he told her " divers things that did not please her." She dismissed him in all amenity with a present of two thousand crowns and a " beautiful mare from her own stables," besides a guide to provide for his safety. Four or five days afterwards, it was noised in the Court that this same philosopher had been killed and plundered by brigands. Catherine, when she heard it, burst out laughing. " By my faith," she cried, " he was a great fool ! He predicted what would happen to others and did not know what would happen to himself."

The Queen-Mother's superstition took strange forms. There was an occasion—the wedding of a personage at Court—when her daughters acted Saint-Gélais' tragedy of "*Sophonisbe*." It was the last time that tragedies were played before her, for after the representation of "*Sophonisbe*," affairs took a bad turn and she thought that it had brought ill-luck to the kingdom. But she permitted what were then called "*tragi-comédies*," and comedies she delighted in. There was one called "*Pantalons*," " at the which she laughed her fill like any other, for in sooth she laughed with a good will, being very jovial of her nature." And although Paris had no theatre for another century, there were strolling bands of players, especially Italians, who acted in private houses. One company, that of the Gelosi, was the fashion in Henri III's reign, and attracted, we are told, larger audiences than the popular preachers. It did much to demoralize the townspeople, for it acted such corrupt plays that the Court, by public ordinance, suppressed it. But, in private, the King encouraged its performances, and an audience of his Mignons applauded them—now at Blois where the Gelosi played in the Salle d'États, now in Paris, in the Hôtel des Bourbons.

They had no greater appreciators than their own countrymen, the great Italian courtiers about the King, those men who, with the " Mignons," shared the hatred of the people.

Frappez dessus à l'étourdi,
Ruinant la vermine ainsi
Qui¹ Florence a produit ici—

—this, the verse of a song of the day, sums up the current

¹ " Qui " would now be " *Que* ."

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sentiment. The Duc de Nevers and the Comte de Retz, whom we formerly knew as Gonzago and Gondi, were the chief offenders, together with the Chancellor Birago, an old man "gouty but robust, deft in affairs of State, wishing to know everything, and having spies and creatures everywhere." He was, perhaps, the most detested of the three. "A miser, doing all for interest and nothing for courtesy . . . his house full of nephews and relations," he was especially qualified to wound the national vanity. "For the rest," continues one who knew him, "all warrants for pardon or arrest had to pass through his hands . . . and he oftentimes hindereth that which he should authorize, or authorizeth that which he should hinder, for that he is a stranger to learning and to the Judge's profession. . . . Moreover he is passing slow and liketh to despatch affairs himself. . . . If of old he was hated as an Italian, at the present he is abhorred as a Chancellor."

The Mignons (the term first appears in 1576) had not even the brevet of office. The Duc d'Épernon, the Duc de Joyeuse, Caylus, de Guast, were the chief of this group of decadents—

"Rash, inconsiderate, fiery, voluntaries,
With ladies' faces and fierce dragons' spleens."

Shakespeare's words are but an epitome of their countrymen's estimate of them—

Et toutefois, ce mol troupeau
De faces ganimédiennes
Et d'âmes épicuriennes,
Qui ne sont que pesant fardeau
Et faix inutile à la France,
Consomme toute la substance
Du Clergé et du Noble aussi,
Et le Tiers Estat, misérable,
Gémît du faix insupportable
De ces prodigues sans souci.

So runs the doggerel of their day, inspired by the bitter moment when they were ruining France by their follies. Their frivolous brawls made the history and the tragedy of the next decade, their inanities decided mortal issues. Unprofitable—and worse—to read about, it yet becomes impossible to ignore them because of their effect upon the State. There was a time when the King tried to use them politically and to transform them into the "Third Party" which Tavannes advised him to create. But Tavannes, when he gave the counsel, had the old Noblesse

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in his mind. The Mignons were too personal to constitute a party; they courted the man, not the monarch, and drifted into intriguing groups with no import but mischief.¹

"These fine Mignons," writes old Estoile, "with their painted faces . . . wore their hair long, frizzed and refrizzed by skilled arts, standing up above their little velvet caps . . . the borders of their linen chemises measuring half a foot, and so weighed down by precious trimmings that when you saw their heads above the pleats, you thought you saw the head of St. John upon the dish. The rest of their garments were to match . . . and they were combed and sprinkled with violet powder and other sweet perfumes, which scented the streets and houses they frequented. Their idea of manly exercise was to play and blaspheme, to dance, leap, quarrel and sin, to dangle after the King, no matter into what company, and to speak and think only for his pleasure—caring not a farthing either for God or for goodness." The public did not keep its wholesome contempt for these irrational creatures to itself, although it was not very safe to air the feeling. There was one occasion when the King, on his way back from Chartres, wished to stop to see the Fair of Saint-Germain. He found the Fair thronged with students dressed up in long chemises with frills—or *fraises*—made out of white paper. "*A la fraise*² on connait le veau!" they were shouting. They did not do so for long—the angry King had them arrested. Neither he nor his Mignons could endure to be made ridiculous.

The perverse distractions of these puppets were of a piece with their appearance. The King gave a banquet at which all the guests, dressed in green, were waited on by ladies attired as men, in the same colour—a little matter of sixty thousand francs' worth of green silk, which poor Paris had to produce. The Queen-Mother, not to be outdone, arranged a return festivity at Chenonceaux, which cost a hundred thousand francs, raised in the form of a loan from the King's servants. Against these Bacchanalia there was none to protest. Once there had been the Maréchal de Tavannes, who at least had had the courage to speak the truth. On an occasion when Henri had arranged some extravagant pageant for a Court wedding, the Maréchal had laughed ironically. "You wish to give a fête," said he, "but instead of these singers who descend from your

¹ Armstrong, *The French Wars of Religion*.

² *Fraise de veau* means calf's liver.

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painted clouds, you will bring down others, and this is what they will say : ' You are fools who spend your money on follies and pay neither soldiers nor police. The foreigners will beat you.' " He had sterner words for Henri's vices. " Death arrives soon enough—why arouse him," he asked, " before his time, by unnatural excesses, the ruin of body and soul ? " But now the wise old soldier was dead and the orgies continued unreprieved.

They were not calculated to produce an edifying effect upon inferiors. After one such feast, the insolent pages and lacqueys broke in pieces " eleven to twelve hundred vessels from Faenza," full of sweetmeats, for no better reason than that the crash amused them, and " that they were of an insolent nature." And while the valets were thus disporting themselves, their masters were working havoc elsewhere, and the Mignons were probably fighting each other under the King's eye in his Privy Closet.

Their blood was too often heated by gambling, for this was one of the pastimes of the King. A band of professional Italians, admitted to the Louvre, won thirty thousand crowns of him at play. To dice and cards, classical diversions for a monarch, Henri could always return when he tired of his other amusements. Talking to parrots and twitting his dwarfs were among these ; and he also spent many hours every day in the quest of little lap-dogs. He drove in his coach with his wife, who shared his taste, all over Paris and further—to " the convents of the suburbs . . . to the great sorrow and displeasure of the ladies to whom the little dogs belonged." It was one of these same privileged animals that he presented to the Venetian envoy, kissing it with lachrymose endearments as if he could hardly bear the parting.

He made other expeditions with his wife by his side—long rambles about Paris which took them into strange places, " the nunneries and other resorts of pleasure " (to quote the words of the old Diarist) " and into remote parts of the city from which they would return at night, oftentimes through mud and evil weather." Once, when his coach broke down, he had to walk a league on foot and did not reach the Louvre till past midnight. Yet the man who stood this needless bodily strain was the same as he who retired exhausted to his bed directly he had to face emotion. And besides these mysterious excursions, he had his public avocations to attend to. Every day he showed himself in the city—" in the

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churches, in the schools of horsemanship and arms, at the tennis-court, and at the Exchange, where he bought a thousand gew-gaws and furbelows."

His most serious occupation was the Latin grammar, which gave him unaccountable pleasure—especially the conjugation of verbs. He shared, too, his mother's taste for magic arts, and kept alchemists in the Louvre whom he watched at work in his apartments. There were also bands of engineers, whom he harboured, so that they might make him "ingenious and finely-wrought machines," "in the which he took great delight." And he ended his strange courses by reading Machiavelli every night. But nothing could change his heartless freaks or his wanton irresponsibility. When his Fool, Foeillet, dared to tell him the truth and describe the people's sufferings from taxation, he was whipped and put in the Bastille. "There was not one son of a good mother that did not pity poor Foeillet," says his chronicler. The remark did not include the King. Yet almost at the same moment that he was giving orders for this cruel arrest, he withdrew to the House of a rigorous Order at Vincennes, there to do nine days' severe penance.

Much of his religious fervour was arranged for effect ; sometimes he played at asceticism and half believed himself to be in earnest, as when he organized a great procession in Paris and sententiously forbade ladies to be of it, "for," said he, "where *they* are, there can be no devotion." And sometimes his piety was directly diplomatic. "He went on foot to all the churches of the city to gain the Jubilee Pardon (sent to France by Pope Gregory XIII), accompanied by only two or three persons, great rosaries dangling from his hand, telling his beads as he walked, muttering as he passed through the streets." He did this, men said, by the counsel of his mother, that the populace might believe that he was a very devout Catholic and encourage him to pick the public purse more liberally than before. But the people of Paris, although usually it was easy enough to impose upon them, especially in things concerning religion, took no manner of notice of his doings."

Like all the Valois, Henri III was a medley of the strangest shreds and patches. His melancholy, which grew as time went on, his aloofness from affairs, lent him a kind of mystery and charm which impressed those near to his person. His retirement from public business was encouraged by his physicians, "a little because of his health, a little because they were

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sycophants"—at least so thought the envoy from Venice ; but it became a form of self-indulgence destructive to the keen brains and practical facility with which he was naturally endowed. The one gift that remained to him was that of eloquence, which he shared with Charles IX, and when he could rouse himself out of his indolence, he made an effect by his speeches. " I only wish," wrote his mother to a friend, " that you could have been at our assembly yesterday, to hear the King upon current events." He might have done well upon the stage ; but he was not big enough for "*le théâtre du monde*," as his sister, Marguerite, called it.

His manners were as motley as his morals. At the outset of his reign he gave great umbrage by his arrogance, especially to the nobles, who " were wont, as every one knoweth, to live in great familiarity with the King." Hitherto it had been their office to wait with uncovered heads upon their monarch, but this was not enough for Henri. He had a barrier set up around his table to prevent anybody addressing him, dealing offence at random to those he should most have sought to conciliate. And straight upon this display of braggart dignity he would proceed to the gambols of a harlequinade, after which, with a turn of mood, he would suddenly play up to the occasion—receive an embassy with princely courtesy, or win back his Court by his easy affability. But he never succeeded in gaining respect, either from his friends or from the public. "*Conciergerie* of the palace," "shopman of the palace," "hairdresser to his wife," "keeper of four beggars," were among the nicknames given him openly by the citizens of Paris, notwithstanding which they walked with their heads still safe upon their shoulders.

The qualities that were his bane were the ones most fostered by Catherine. She delighted in his effeminate inconsequence. He was, says Correro, "the right eye and the soul of his mother." Already before his accession she was incessantly with him, riding, walking, sitting by his side. "She never lets him alone," goes on the same writer ; "in his journeys, in his goings and comings, she always has him with her, and she often has her meals with him, too."

She was a wiser pupil of Machiavelli than he was, for she assumed his virtues when he had them not and never failed to treat him as a good King.

"*Monsieur mon fils*," she wrote in the first year of his reign—"This porter is bound for Paris and will give you news of me

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if you care to ask for them. And because he is half a Capucin, I shall speak to you by him of devotional matters, for God, I know, will be pleased thereat. And this is my request, that you should renew the ordinance forbidding swearing and blaspheming . . . and punish those who do not keep it . . . and firmly resolve to give neither bishopric nor any benefice with the cure of souls, excepting to learned men of good life."

It is easier to advise than to follow one's own counsels. Catherine, restrained enough in big matters, was self-indulgent in small ones. She made herself ill by eating too many "crests of cocks" and artichokes. Yet at bearing pain she was a Stoic. "I think this will be my yearly *rente* at this season," she said of the rheumatism, which, as she grew older, tormented her. The fact was that she could not endure gloom, either in herself or in others. She forgave most things to anybody who was amusing, and a tournament of words, that favourite exercise of Renaissance wit, never failed to exhilarate her. "For of her nature she was jovial and loved to give a good repartee, and knew very well where to place her word and her missile. She could relish a joke against herself, and about personal matters she showed a tolerant good nature." "She was never gayer," writes a contemporary, "than when some one brought her a good satire against herself, the bitterer, ruder, coarser, the better. Once when the King of Navarre and she were standing in the window of a low-ceilinged room, they listened to two tramps outside who were roasting a goose, and, as they did so, they talked loudly, telling ugly stories of the Queen, cursing her and giving her foul names for all the evil she had done them. Whereupon the King of Navarre wanted to take leave of her, intending to go and have them hanged. But she only called out through the window: '*Hé*/what, after all, has she done to you? It is thanks to her that you have that goose to roast.' Then, turning to the King of Navarre—'Cousin,' she said, 'it is not meet that our anger should fall so low. Such as these are not *our* game.' " When a Jacobin monk preached in the Sens Cathedral against her indulgence to the Protestants, her only vengeance was to send twelve crowns as a present to his monastery. And she was equally easy-going with her more acknowledged enemies. When she heard that the Huguenots had a cannon which they called *la Reine Mère*, so big and heavy that they had to bury it, she asked why it bore her name. Because it was of weightier and bulkier calibre than its fellows, was the answer. And at this not

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too flattering joke, she laughed the first, and she laughed without malice.

The simile was no unfitting one. Catherine was now immensely stout. Yet she still danced and rode astride with zest, and delighted in inventing games. She excelled with the *arbalesque à jalet*—the shooting of stones instead of arrows. Her complexion was fresh : “ she had not a wrinkle on her round full face,” which was set off by the long black widow’s veil she always wore, fastened back from her forehead and falling down upon her shoulders. This was for indoors ; when she went out she put a little woollen hat upon the top of it. Had we met her, we should have probably thought her a jolly soul—a little inclined to be cynical. But we should have found her good company ; colloquial in her speech, with vivid turns of expression. We should also, no doubt, have apprehended the formidable powers behind the laughter ; the whole electric battery of personality which might, at any moment, let forth its unknown forces and work destruction. “ She had these moods not infrequently,” says one who knew her, “ with Princes too, and those among the greatest. . . . And at such times she was possessed by anger and put herself upon a height. Nor was anything in the world so superb as she when she had to be so, for her tongue spared the truth to no one.”

Perhaps the gift most useful to her was the remarkable power of concentration which made her quickly pass from one task to another. Brantôme says that he watched her write twenty long letters in an afternoon. And on one of those uncomfortable journeys in a litter to which ladies were then subjected, she, unconscious of joltings and of stoppings, would read through ten pages of parchment—a dry *procès verbal*—“ as if she were a lawyer or reporter,” without lifting her eyes till she had finished. Her style in writing is businesslike and terse, illumined here and there by homely wit and racy phrase. In later years, it is only when she writes to Henri III that her manner melts into something like tenderness. And even as early as 1575, a note of sadness creeps in. We feel that she is going to be punished through the only creature she adored, and the most independent of her. The independence hurt her sorely. Any fiction that he needed her was over, and now his Mignons had taken him from her. He confided nothing to her ; she was, in this first flush of his power, consistently kept out of his counsels. There is pathos in her attitude towards him, and it comes out in her correspondence. “ Give orders,” she writes, “ for some

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one to tell me how your affairs are going. I do not ask this because I wish to control them, but because if they go well, my heart will be at ease, and if they go ill, I can help your trouble. . . . For you are my all, and whether or no you love me, you do not trust me as you ought. Forgive me if I speak straight out like this. I have no wish to live any longer. I have never cared for life since your father died, excepting as I might serve you and God."

This was written in a moment of dejection ; it did not express the whole truth. Half her grief, though perhaps she did not know it, was for her loss of influence, and that she was determined to regain. " All the world recognizes," says Michieli, " that to preserve supreme authority, even after the minority of her son was over, she fomented every discord, using now one faction, now another, as it suited her interests. She always did her best to keep her children out of affairs and from having any serious occupation, even when their childish years were passed ; so that stranded, without force or experience, they would always be compelled to turn to her. . . . By this means her power is still on the increase."

Yet there were three people at the Court who dominated the next few years by their intrigues, over whom her sway had practically ceased : Alençon, Marguerite, and Henri de Navarre.



.. CHAPTER XIV

La Reine Margot

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His eyes expressed his humours: "They were keen, but they were kind, and they were constantly veiled." Michieli has left us a sketch of him—

"He is not tall, but he is well-made; he has no beard; his hair is black; his mind is bold and full of life, like his mother's. He is affable, familiar, and his manners show a great amenity. As for his feelings, their level is high enough."

"No one has faith in this Prince's constancy," says another envoy: "He has no belief, and I hear that he makes fun of his own Huguenot preachers while they are in the pulpit. On a certain day when one of these rascals was preaching, the King of Navarre was eating cherries, and he threw the stones at the minister's face, nearly knocking out one of his eyes."

He was the true Gallic sceptic—the cheerful pessimist, matter-of-fact to the core, but so facile in his emotions that no one suspected that he was so. He had a singular faculty for tears. He wept for love, he wept for friendship, he wept for pity. But he easily wore through his sentiments as he wore through everything else. He was all movement and no patience. Sustained effort seemed impossible to him. "An order to a captain, a rendezvous, a word of love" was enough for his powers of endurance. When he grew tired of people, and even of horses, and when everybody got upon his nerves, then says d'Aubigné, "*il forçait une danse*"—"and he alone *danced*," adds Michelet. Yet he had had the education which should have produced the stoical faculty. His mother had brought him up almost roughly, with an eye ever turned towards the practical. Even his classics had been adapted to everyday use and he had only learned Latin as a tongue for speaking. Early habit may have helped him to take in things, as he did, at a glance. If he could not concentrate himself for long, he concentrated himself with such force that a minute meant as much to him as hours mean to an average person.

Warm-witted he was, but not warm-hearted. His ease in changing his beliefs, his aversion to gloom and sorrow, his relations with his several score of lady-loves, go to prove his fundamental coldness. There was not a grain of poetry in his composition, but there was a great deal of grace and of song. And perhaps, had his feelings been stronger, he would not have enjoyed the gift of perpetual youth which made so large a part of his attractiveness.

One day after his divorce from Margot, when a second



HENRI DE NAVARRE (HENRI IV DE FRANCE), JEUNE.

BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE.

FRANÇOIS QUESNEL ? VERS 1582

From a photograph by A. Giraudon.

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marriage was suggested to him, he went alone for a walk, that he might reflect upon the matter. After a quarter of an hour he returned and stood silent before his adviser, meditatively rubbing his head. At last, with a sacrificial air, he cried: "*Eh bien, de par Dieu!* let it be so; remedy there is none. . . . You say that I must be married; well, then, I must; but it is a condition that I sorely apprehend." The story is an epitome of the man. Margot's comment on their union is more bitter than his. "What evil do I not wish him! Oh! let no man tell me that marriages are made in heaven; the gods would never be guilty of such an injustice." Yet these two persons, ill-assorted for union, were pre-eminently made to be friends. They amused one another so much that they could not do without constant correspondence, and, to the end, they remained what they were—good comrades.

Their marriage soon became unhappy. Margot had lovers, Henri mistresses. But even supposing his wife's morals had given him less cause for offence, they could have known no comfort together. They were both too much alike—too brilliant, too immoral to be mated, too restless in mind and energy. And perhaps Marguerite was too much of his equal in intellect, for her powers were the feminine of his. Action she must have; and since "she could do no good because a woman," she did ill, and spent her fine brain upon intrigue.

Her vitality was incredible; in one day she was scholar, reader, politician, friend, Queen and—very much—woman; with her right hand she wrote her charming letters, or the memoirs that still remain so fresh; with her left she pulled the hundred wires that governed her complicated love-affairs, or those of other people. The Reine Margot summed up a whole period. She was the *ne plus ultra* of the Renaissance lady. She was also the beginning of the modern woman. She was natural, and launched forth against hypocrisy and all the deceit of etiquette. She was warm and spontaneous, with generous instincts. And she was a subtle student of character, beginning, like a modern, with herself. Her frankness was full of courage.

There was a time when Epernon, her mortal foe, "whom she could not see without great anger," came upon a visit to Nérac, and her husband, for political reasons, begged her to receive him. "For the love of me," he urged, "put your rancour beneath your feet." Against her will, she consented. "I will stay," she said, "and make good cheer for him." "But

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I promise you," she added to her ladies, "that directly he appears and as long as he stays, I shall wear a garment that I never yet wore—dissimulation and hypocrisy." She could mask her feelings she said, but she could not answer for the results—since "her heart was not in her power, but made all of one piece—so high it was, and full of freedom."

As in the case of many intellectual people, Marguerite's mind did not match with her temperament. Her mind, full of feminine intuitions, was large and virile; she was polished and sophisticated, but she had a direct grasp of ideas, independent of any personal interest. Her temperament was the coarse temperament of primitive woman. She could not see a man without setting out to conquer him, and the moral sense was left out of her. Philosopher, and woman of gallantry as she was, who can define her? She was rather un-moral than immoral, and the notion of an obligation to any one of the long procession of lovers who crowded the canvas of her life did not so much as enter her ken. She was said to be more like her father than any of his other children, "whether in her ways and her humours, her look and features, or in her generosity and courage"—but she would never have shown his constancy to Diane. This objectionable side to her nature has been too much dwelt on—to the eclipse of her other qualities, so much worthier of remembrance, so much finer in many ways than those of most women of her generation. "She shamed the greatest by her liberality," and "her brothers were amazed" at the *étrennes* that she gave. "They did not follow her example." She was always signally humane, though her humanity—here again she was like her husband—came rather from the head than the heart. Her intellect, indeed, was in all that she did. She was a great reader of Rabelais, of "Plutarch's Lives" of the Bible, and the poets; and she thought as a pupil of the Humanists. She herself has left us the most authentic summary of the better part of her.

"What helped me on the road of devotion," she wrote in her memoirs, "was reading in the fair and universal Book of Nature so many marvels concerning its Creator. In sooth, they are such that every well-born soul, making of his knowledge a ladder of which God is the last and highest step, standeth there rapt, in adoration of this wonderful light and the splendour of this incomparable Essence. And, making a perfect circle, the spirit finds its only pleasure in following

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that Chain . . . which, proceeding from God Himself, returns to God Himself, the Principle and End of all things. . . . And sadness (the opposite of joy which whirls away from us the consciousness of our actions) awakes our soul in its inmost self, the which gathering all its forces to reject evil and to seek out good, thinks and re-thinks without ceasing, how it may choose this sovereign good, wherein, for its assurance, it may perchance find some tranquillity—the state that best inclines us to come into the knowledge and love of God. These two benefits have I received from sorrow and from solitude . . . to love study, and to give myself up to devotion.”

The passions, the intrigues, which the woman who set down these words was still enjoying while she wrote them, had nothing to do with her idea of goodness. The difference between goodness and virtue was never more dangerously emphasized than in the days of the Renaissance, when all barriers were destroyed, and men and women—especially women—were filled with a reckless love of living, a boundless curiosity about pleasure. The distinction is a real one, but it is difficult for mortal men to make it and to keep their heads. It is hard to deal with a woman whose goodness was better than her virtue, and almost impossible to judge her. “A fig for virtue!” Margot would have said with Iago, but a large conception of life, condemning few, was part of her code of honour.

There was, however, one thing that she could not get over. Like many conquering women, she easily assumed that she inspired all men with passion, and for some time she believed that her Chancellor, Pibrac, was in love with her. He had sent her one of those hyperbolic letters which were usual then from subjects to their Queens; but she had taken it for a billet-doux and had replied to it in that character. Pibrac, too honest for his day, had undeceived her, and she did not pardon him.

“There was,” she writes, “no need for you to excuse yourself for not answering me, on the score of your indisposition. I make no doubt that this illness and the importunity of my Seals, which you have used so continually, have greatly damaged your health: of the which I am no less careful for you than you are of my repose, and so I beg you to send me back my Seals. . . . You will, if you please, hand them over to Manicquet, who will despatch them to me by the post. I

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pray God, Monsieur de Pibrac, that He will give you what He knows to be needful for you.

"Your least obliged friend,
"M."

Pibrac's answer is as characteristic of Margot as her letter to him. It shows us the terms on which she allowed her friends to stand with her and flashes her free-and-easiness upon us as no conscious account of her Court could do. Pibrac had a temper of his own.

"Our way of writing now-a-days in France," he says, "is full of excess and exaggeration. The simple words 'to love' and 'to serve' are not 'used' any longer. Everybody adds 'extremely,' 'infinitely,' 'passionately,' 'distractedly' ('*éperdument*') and the like—so far as even to lend divinity to things that are less than human. No brother writes to his sister, no sister to her brother, no servant to his mistress, without allowing himself to be transported into extremes by the expressions of the day; without putting himself outside the pale and the demands of decency—I might even say of honest manners. But since one has to write and cannot do without these fashions, I think that reason should oblige those who receive letters to refer the words that they contain to the rank and condition of the writers."

It was Marguerite's wont to seek adventures, the more compromising the better; and, till her death, she had a hearty appetite for forbidden fruit. At the "*festins*" where her presence was "boldest and least permitted" she made a point of showing herself, snapping her fingers at public opinion and enjoying the shocks that she gave it. "An expert in effrontery," she has been called; she gave heroic names to light adventures, "running risks under pretext of fidelity, braving custom in the name of generous pride," and committing all her outrage "gay-heartedly," with no grudge towards the world. Like the rest of her family, she was an actor, and, more than the rest of them, an artist. She was not creative, although, like all great ladies of her day, she composed verses and sang them to her lute—to the hyperbolic ravishment of courtiers. But Marguerite was finer than they were. She delighted in beauty; she was a lover of letters; a little anxious, as a fashionable Princess would be, to possess "the last thing out," and "very curious," her great friend, Brantôme, tells us, "in the quest of *beaux livres nouveaux*."

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But her taste for novelty was interwoven with real literary instinct and with generosity towards rising talent. "She talked," said Cardinal Richelieu in his memoirs, "better than any woman of her time and wrote with more style than was common among persons of her sex." Brantôme is even more handsome in his comments. "There is none," he said, "who, reading *her* letters, would not make mock of poor Cicero and of *his*, which are so very familiar in their tone." It is the hall-mark of Brantôme's banality that he did not discover that the "familiarity" which distinguished Cicero also distinguished her correspondence from that of her contemporaries and gave it its one chance of survival. The flourishes and compliments of her generation, the mortal part of literature admired by Brantôme, is just what has made her letters lie unread. Montaigne would have praised them because they were herself—racy, human, vivid, with here and there a touch of Madame de Sevigné, and here and there a grain of Voltaire's salt. Here and there, too, it must be added, intervals of arid, trifling business, dead for the reader of to-day.

She had the real letter-writer's power of making something out of nothing, wherever she might be. "One lives here without the slightest novelty," she wrote while languishing in Gascony—"Always the same worries, always the same stupid deeds. . . . Gascony is so annoying that it can only grow news exactly like itself." Any life away from Court bored her, and her reading "in the fair and universal Book of Nature" could only have taken a few minutes. She was unable to understand her husband's love of the country, and before the days of their separation, she did her best to make him give it up. He is, she says, neglecting his career; why does he not come to join her? "There has been music at the Louvre, and it lasted all the night. Everybody was at the windows to listen to it, and the King was there too, dancing about in his room, much more amused at these gambades than is his wont. We are having balls and round-table suppers twice a week . . . and (let me venture to tell you) if only you were a proper man, you would leave agriculture and the tempers of Timon to come and live among men."

She delights in describing the Court doings. "What we heard about Monsieur de Mayenne is far from being true," she writes again. "He has grown so preposterously fat that

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he has become deformed. Monsieur de Guise has grown very thin and very old. As to their humours, they are just as when you last saw them ; only perhaps they are a little more *astonished*. They are not much run after, and they often make up parties for tennis, or ball, or pall-mall, to attract the *Noblesse*. But those who attend them twice are quite certain to catch a reprimand, which shows pretty clearly that there is jealousy between Dukes and Nobles. If you were here, you would be the person upon whom both parties would depend."

The kind of cleverness that Marguerite possessed was bound to be exploited by others. If she was an adventuress, she was one whom we can pity. Used in turn by her mother, Anjou, Alençon, her husband, in turn they threw her away when they ceased to need her. She had been kind to Elizabeth of Austria, and the most virtuous woman at Court was almost her only friend there. For where she found sincerity, she was capable of sincere friendship. "You are my Sibyl, there is great sympathy between you and me. Our humours suit, and the sixty years between us can make no difference to that " so she wrote, in later days, to the old Duchesse d'Uzès, whom she trusted. And because she had few thus to trust, because, too, intriguer that she was, she had the qualities which stifle friendship, her need of it was not the less real. Towards inferiors she was admirable. She might behave like a *vivandière*—she could forgive like a Queen. "One of her ladies, who died at Chenonceaux, had caused her great displeasure. But she did not treat her the worse for that, and the lady falling very ill, she came to visit her." She was with her when she died. "Whatever she has done, the poor girl is now a suffering creature. God forgive her, as I do!" were her words.

Such stories show the best of her. There is unfortunately another side. She was wronged—she was also insupportable. Wherever she went, she plotted, and mischief sprang up in her footsteps. Like every scheming woman, she never failed to pose as a martyr and compel some one to officiate as her champion. When her wiry web was woven and her position strongest, she appealed as the weak and helpless woman. "And God," she tells us, "always regarded my affliction, that He might keep me from the danger and the trouble that my enemies prepared for me. For they were much more on the spot than I was." She was fond, too, of playing the victim on the altar of public duty.

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"I will never," she cries, "prefer my private good to that of my brothers and of this realm, for the repose and peace of which I am quite willing to sacrifice myself." It is a truth, perhaps not enough recognized, that those who act the heroine are apt, if the occasion offers, to succeed in the part so often rehearsed. When the dramas invented by them become reality, they seem more natural to them than to others; they are more prepared to take the stage. The actor's power is not necessarily insincere.

Wherever Margot was, she led. One day her mother told her she was well dressed. "Madame," she replied, "I am trying to wear out these clothes early, and, when I leave, I shall carry with me the present-day fashions at Court. But when I come back, I shall only bring scissors and some stuff, and have myself dressed at once in the fashion that will have come in by then." "Why say that, my daughter?" quoth the Queen: "you yourself invent and set the fashion; and wherever you may be, the Court will take it from you, not you from the Court." "As was true," concludes the chronicler, "so well did her charming spirit understand how to invent all goodly things. . . . And all these fashions did she know how to adapt; adding ever some new device which was not common and was in nowise imitable; and when other ladies tried to model themselves upon her, they never came anywhere near her—as I have oftentimes noted."

Marguerite was the essence of what modern Frenchmen call *chic*—a style of its nature artificial, with a charm which lies in frank self-consciousness. She was not only a pattern, she was a kind of show for the public. Catherine once begged her to dress up in her grandest gala robes, "to give pleasure to the good ladies" of Cognac: "the which she did to show obedience to such a good mother, and appeared most superbly arrayed." We get fleeting impressions of her in her splendour. Now she is walking in a procession, in a dress of heavy cloth of gold, a palm in her hand, her face without a mask, uncovered to the view, her motion expressive of "a grace half disdainful and half gentle, very different from that of any other woman." Her attire had been "a present from the Grand Turk to a French gentleman, who was leaving Constantinople. . . . And she wore it all day, although it weighed her down extremely; her tall full figure bearing it well. . . . But if she had been a little pigmy princess, or a lady an elbow's length in height, such as I (Brantôme) have seen, she would

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have dropped beneath the burden." Another time, she is dancing the *Bransle de la Torche*, before the grandees of Lyons, and, the dancers moving forward in a long train, pass a flaming torch from hand to hand. "She took great pleasure in dancing these serious dances, by reason of the comely movement. . . . and grave majesty which she showed forth . . . in *bransles*, *voltes*, and *courantes*." And on all occasions, as when Brantôme saw her, she ran counter to the current fashion of masking her face, preferring to feel the air upon it. Nor did she always keep to one mode in anything. Her hair-dresser must have had an arduous life. Sometimes she wore her natural hair," which was black, like her father's, and then she "twisted and frizzed and arranged it," till it looked like the wig of her sister, the Queen of Spain, who put on false black hair *à l'Espagnole*; sometimes she wore a fair wig taken weekly from flaxen-haired footmen whom she kept for the purpose. She was very particular about her wigs, and had them most delicately finished; and whatever she did, the world accepted.

It was not surprising that she looked upon herself as an Olympian; she was compared to every goddess in the pagan calendar. Brantôme, her gossip and sycophant, to whom she dedicated her Memoirs, was never behindhand with flattery. "Tell me truly," he said to Ronsard, as they stood next each other at the Tuileries, once when the Queen of Navarre appeared in State, "doth it not seem to you that you see Her Majesty appareled like Aurora at her birth before the daybreak—with her white face flushed with rose-red? Their faces show great sympathy and likeness, the one with the other." "Monsieur Ronsard admitted it, and upon this comparison, which he thought very beautiful, he wrote a fine sonnet which he gave me." The Aurora of Brantôme was a Court lady and her cheeks were painted, but Ronsard, the poet, should have known better than to be so badly inspired.

It is not to be wondered at that a woman such as Marguerite should prove a danger to the State, more especially in conjunction with a brother like Alençon—"a Prince more ardent than the King and more vindictive—in brief more bent upon changes, not only in France, but abroad." Like many schemers, Alençon had deceptive looks. "His countenance," continues the Venetian, "is open and jolly. . . . His beard is only just beginning to grow . . . his hair is black and curly and stands up high upon his forehead, which elongates his

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race . . . He takes little pleasure in bodily exercise . . . and as to the art of riding . . . he shows but scanty grace therein. He affects popular manners, but he seeks at the same time how he may please the great, who, spurred by their own interests, agitate the kingdom on his behalf. In everything that he has written, whether in complaint or self-justification . . . he has always shown his desire to reform the kingdom."

Did the Prince's "desire for reform" deceive anybody? Did it deceive himself? Of all Catherine's sons, Alençon was the most inclined to overdo his part. In his anxiety to play the Huguenot well, he always refused to travel on the Sabbath. But his Puritanism did not prevent him from chattering all through divine service with his friends, and he never knelt "on more than one knee," because kneeling on both was too uncomfortable. Calvin would have truly been amazed at such a captain of his flock.

Alençon, Navarre, and La Reine Margot—such were now the three surprising leaders of reform and of Protestantism. Of the trio, the Queen-Mother looked upon her daughter as more formidable than the rest. Not only was she the most cunning and elusive. There was a worse danger than that. Married as she was to a Prince of the Blood, she might, at any moment, be concerting hidden plots for the succession. The notion of the Huguenot Bourbon upon the throne was Catherine's bugbear; it had haunted her ever since the early days of Margot's marriage. "There was," an eye-witness tells us, "a lady at Court (her name I will not mention) who was as foolish as she possibly could be. One night when the Queen-Mother had retired for her *Coucher*, she asked her women if they had seen her daughter. . . . The talk fell upon the union with Navarre, whereupon this foolish lady, ignorant, as yet of the Court, stepped forward first, and said, 'It would in truth, be strange, Madame, did the Princess not rejoice in this alliance, since she gains one crown thereby, and is in good train to be one day Queen of France, if the French Crown fall also to her husband . . . as it very likely may.' The Queen-Mother, when she heard such a strong speech, said unto her, '*Ma mye*, you are a great fool; I would rather see you pierced with a thousand deaths than that your prophecy should ever come true. . . . I wish long life and prosperity to the King and to all my other children.'" "I would sooner die a hundred times myself," she exclaimed later, "than see her in this condition, for there would, as I

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believe, be no obedience to the King of Navarre, as there would be to my children. And this for many reasons that I will not say." Then remembering that her words might seem to derogate from her child's prerogative—"Of course," she added, "if the Salic law were abolished and the kingdom went to my daughter by right—like other kingdoms that have fallen under the distaff—then, of a surety, my daughter would be as capable as any man to govern, and more so than many men and Kings whom I know. Her reign, I think, would be a fine one. She would make it like that of her grandfather . . . for she has a great mind and great qualities for such a task." The conversation strayed after that into discussion of the Salic law. The law was an abuse, repeated Catherine, and she recalled how in old days Cardinal Granvella had fought the Cardinal de Lorraine who had defended it. "Your Salic law," had cried Granvella, "is a scandal—I am ready to hit you in the eye for it. And as for the men who framed it, they were nothing but old dreamers and dusty chroniclers." The subject came dangerously near the Queen-Mother's *affetto di signoreggiare*, and it remained in her thoughts in the form of permanent suspicion of Marguerite.

The danger arising from that lady may be said to have begun with her birth. But there was a more direct reason for her machinations, and it lay in her brother, the King. Ever since their breach over Guise, he had taken an aversion to her and, in later times, devoted a large part of his petty energies to vexing and insulting her. In this way, he himself cast her upon Alençon. He might have neutralized their power by setting one to thwart the other. Instead of that, he forced them to make common cause against him. And he urged on his favourites to slander her, thus making her their bitterest enemy. De Guast was the chief of these offenders. Even before Henri went to Poland, he (de Guast) had spoken evil of her, and it was when he returned from that country to France, that her wrath first blazed out upon him. De Guast came with letters from the King and brought them to her apartments. When she saw him advance to kiss her hand, she lost her temper. Her face flushed with anger. "Much good may it do you, de Guast," said she, "to present yourself before me with this letter from my brother, which stands you in good stead as a safeguard! For I love him so dearly that all who come from him live in freedom with me. If it were not for that, I would teach you to prate about a Princess

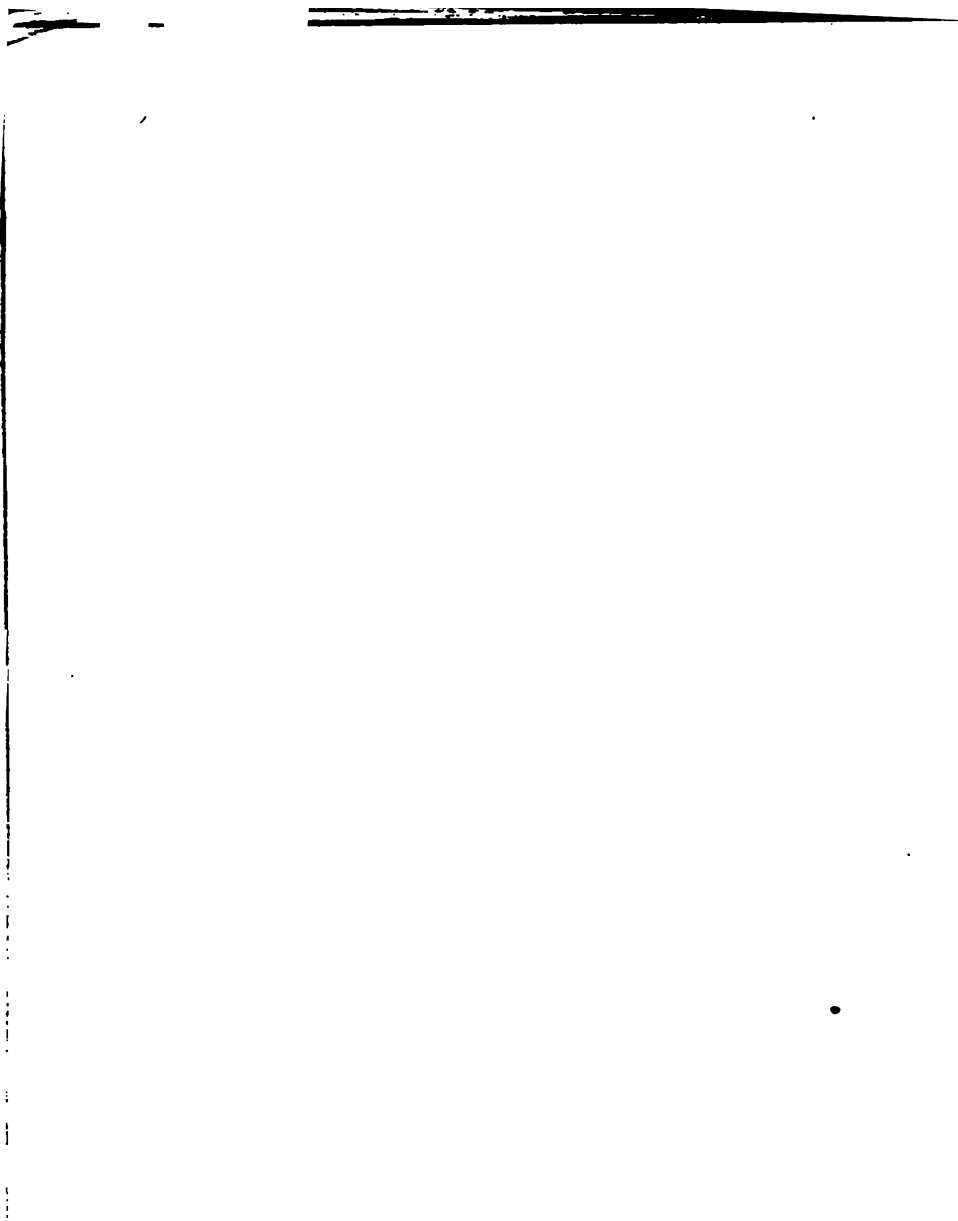
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such as I am, a sister of Kings—of your master and of four other sovereigns.” De Guast humbled himself to the dust, professed his innocence of her charges against him, entreated her to hear him for the love that they both bore towards His Majesty. But “she sent him away, and protested that she would always be his cruel enemy—a promise that she kept until his death.” Madame de Dampierre, her lady, ventured to remonstrate with her and to urge the precedent of her royal aunt of Savoy, who had behaved far otherwise in like circumstances. “Marguerite listened with close attention.” Then “rather coldly, yet with lips that were half laughing (according to their wont), ‘Madame de Dampierre,’ she answered, ‘what you say would be all very well for you who need royal favour . . . but for me, who am the daughter of a King, and the sister of Kings, and the wife of a King, it is of no use. . . . For my honour’s sake, I cannot be a beggar for grace from my brother. If he feels worthy to be King and to be loved by me and by his people, I also feel worthy to be Queen and to be beloved, not only by him, but by all the world.’ Then, drawing herself to her full height, ‘If my aunt, whom you cite,’ she concluded, ‘so abased herself, as you tell me, let her do it if she could, and if such was her humour. But her example is no law for me, and *I* have no desire to form myself upon this model, or, indeed, upon any but myself.’”

Here spoke the independent woman of all times, and her words had an ominous significance. The scene with de Guast rankled because she felt the King behind him. It was after this that her feud with Henri began in deadly earnest.

CHAPTER XV

The Escape of the Princes



CHAPTER XV

The Escape of the Princes

SOON after the entry of Henri III into Paris, Catherine experienced a fresh blow in the death of her eldest living daughter, the Duchesse de Lorraine. The sorrow that she felt was real enough to keep her ill in bed, while the King, who made no pretence of grief, was hunting and dancing with the Court a few days after the event. He too, before long, fell a prey to malady—some strange affection of the ear—the result of dissipation ; but, panic-stricken as was his wont, he immediately concluded that Alençon was attempting his life and took his measures accordingly.

There was at that moment a breach between Alençon and Navarre, both being in love with that reckless lady, Madame de Sauve, who seems to have distributed her favours with impartial amenity to either. The King, who was aware of the quarrel, summoned Navarre to his presence and, in the course of conversation, suggested that he might with little difficulty put Alençon out of the way and so probably secure the succession. It is a comfort to find that Navarre, although a Prince, angrily refused to be a criminal and treated the King with disdain. It was the King's constant effort to sow discord between his brother and his brother-in-law, who, together, were a danger to the throne, but, singly, were comparatively innocuous ; and their jealousy concerning their mistress gave him frequent opportunities to effect his purpose. There was, however, an obstacle to his success—the figure of his sister, Marguerite, who acted as conciliatory diplomat between her husband and Alençon, not from any love of peace, but because she wished to maintain an opposition to the Crown. Envenomed by de Guast's reports, the King believed that she had used his absence to foment these intrigues against him, and from this time onwards he persecuted her with fresh impetus and with an unrelenting enmity. It was easy

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ugh to strike at her—her name was already sadly
ished.

There were now two main camps in Paris; that of the King and his Mignons, Maugiron, Saint Mesgrin, de Guast and Caylus, later, Epernon and Joyeuse; that of Alençon and his followers, chief among them Simier and Bussy d'Amboise, who was by now Marguerite's lover. Between him and de Guast there existed a mortal hatred, of which the King was not slow to avail himself; nor did de Guast, amply supported by allies, cease to poison Henri's ear against his sister.

"One afternoon," writes Marguerite, "my mother having entered her closet to compose some long despatches, Madame de Nevers, Madame de Retz, Bourdeille, and Surgères, asked me if I should like a turn in the town. Upon that, Mademoiselle de Montigny, the niece of Madame d'Uzès, told us that the Convent of Saint-Pierre was a very fine house of religion. We resolved to go there, and she begged to come too, because she had an aunt there, and no free admission to the place was obtainable except for the great and those who came with them. So she accompanied us, and as we got into our coach, Liancourt, the King's First Groom, was standing there with Camille, and they threw themselves upon the carriage door. We went to the Convent, and my coach, which was easily recognizable because it was gilt and lined with yellow velvet trimmed with silver, waited for us in the Square, in which divers gentlemen had lodgings. While we were in Saint-Pierre, the King, with no one with him but my husband, d'O, and fat Ruffé, passed by on their way to see Caylus, who was ill. And strolling through the Square and seeing my coach, he said to my husband—'Look, there is your wife's chariot. And there are the lodgings of Bidé. . . . I swear (said he) that she is inside them.' On the which he commanded fat Ruffé, de Guast's friend, and so a proper instrument for work so malicious, to go in and see. Ruffé found no one, but he did not wish the truth to hamper His Majesty's design, and he said aloud to him, in the presence of the King, my husband: 'The birds have been there, but they are flown.' At this, my royal brother made haste to get back before me, might persuade my mother of this invention and me to receive an affront. Meanwhile, I, returning without knowing a word of all this, was about to go into my room, with all the troop that had driven

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with me to Saint-Pierre. There I found my husband, who, as soon as he saw me, burst out laughing and said—' Pray go to the Queen-Mother ; I am sure you will come back in a great rage.' As I saw that I could not get a word more out of him, I went in to my mother. When I entered the hall, I found M. de Guise, who, with some foresight, was by no means sorry for the division that he saw in our House, for he hoped that the vessel once broken, he would be able to pick up the pieces. Quoth he, ' I was awaiting you here to warn you that the King has done you a dangerous charity. . . . ' I went into the Queen-Mother's room ; she was not there. But I found Madame de Nemours and all the other Princesses and ladies, who said to me : ' *Mon Dieu*, Madame, the Queen, your mother, is furious with you. We do not advise you to present yourself before her.' I entered her Privy Closet, which was only separated from her apartment by a wooden partition, so that she could easily hear all that was said there. The moment she saw me, she began to dart forth fire and to say everything that unmeasured and outrageous anger could throw up. I represented the truth and told her that we had been a company of ten to twelve persons. But she had no ear either for truth or reason. After I had left her presence, filled with all the spite involved in such an insult, I found my husband in my room. ' Well, was it not all just as I told you ? ' he asked ; then, noting my misery—' Do not you torment yourself,' he added, ' Liancourt and Camille will be at the King's *Coucher* and they will inform him of the wrong that he has done you.' "

The Reine Margot is, to say the least, no more accurate about herself than most other autobiographers. She is always a charming novelist, not always an authentic source of reference. But the expedition to the house of religion, her husband's laughter, her meeting with Guise, the wrath of Catherine, bear upon them the stamp of experience. It was the light in which she looked at events which falsified them. As likely as not, she *was* in Bidé's apartments, but whether she had been or no, she would always have posed as injured innocence. She was clever enough to end by taking in even her mother. But this was not so at the outset. For the moment, Catherine subjected her to fresh indignities.

" Next day," continued Marguerite, " an Italian banker who served my brother begged him and my husband and

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myself, together with divers ladies and Princesses, to go and dine in a beautiful garden that he had in the city. I, who had always kept that respect towards my Queen-Mother which bound me while I was near her, whether as maid or wife, to go nowhere without asking her leave, now went to find her in the hall, on her return from Mass, to beg her to let me go to this banquet. On the which she, rejecting me in public, told me that she did not care where I went. I had better do as I liked. . . . But while we were at this gay dinner, the King, who had spoken with Liancourt and Camille, and also with Mademoiselle de Montigny, discovered his mistake. He went straightway and confessed the truth to my mother, and entreated her to mend matters somehow, so that I might not remain his enemy. For he knew that I had an intellect, and he feared lest I should know how to revenge myself even better than he had known how to offend me. When we returned from our feastings . . . my mother sent for me to her back-study, which was near to that of the King, and told me that the whole story meant nothing and that what I had told her was true. . . . And seeing by my face that I did not welcome these overtures, she tried by every means in her power to do away with my conviction that it was the King who had done me all this kindness ; but she did not make much way with me, and she knew it. After which the King came into the Closet and proffered me a thousand excuses, saying that others had forced them to believe things, and giving me every satisfaction and every show of affection that was possible."

The cowardly King was only shamming and soon returned to the charge, this time with tales of Bussy and his sister. But now Catherine held her own, though she must have known that this time the scandals were true, and were the talk of the town. She had grown afraid of her daughter. "I do not know," she replied to Henri, "who the firebrands can be that have put such notions in your head. My girl is unhappy to have been born into such a century. In our time, we talked freely with all the world, and all the well-bred men who followed your father and your uncles were to be seen every day in the rooms of Madame Marguerite and in mine. Nobody thought it strange, nor was there any reason to think so. Bussy sees my daughter in your presence, in her husband's, publicly, before all her husband's suite, in her own room ; she does not do this in secret, with closed doors. Bussy is a personage of quality.

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... What harm is there in this? Through your calumnies ... you have already made me offer her an insult which I am afraid she will feel all her life." The King stood there amazed. "Madam, I only say what others tell me," he said. "Who are these others, my son?" she rejoined—"they are people who wish to set you and all your folk by the ears."

Catherine was probably sincere in her regret for the good old days of frank companionship. Merciless though she was, she was neither backbiter nor evil-thinker. And she saw that these scandal-mongers were bound to work mischief. The fact was that the Mignon, de Guast, was the bitter foe of Bussy, and his enmity worked in well with the King's spite against his sister and against Bussy's master, Alençon. The feud between that Prince's faction and that of Henri grew daily more accentuated, and the next thing was an attempt, instigated by de Guast, to murder Bussy. It was an attempt that failed. The assassin had been told to pick out of a certain band of gentlemen the one that wore "a sling of stuff shot like a pigeon's breast," and to see that he died. Unfortunately, another man had adopted the same fashion and was slain in his stead. The real Bussy escaped from the scuffle with a wound, and went off laughing, in a dare-devil mood, to the Louvre—for him a nest of danger. There he was arrested and so was his colleague, Simier. Alençon himself was imprisoned for a few days in the palace, during which his mother persuaded him to allow Bussy to retire from Court till the storm should have blown over. Not long afterwards, Bussy was avenged. In the October of that same year, de Guast was found strangled in his bed. "That musket of hate and division," as Margot called him, had fired his last shot. Marguerite was ill at the time that she heard the welcome news. "I am vexed," she said, "that I am not well. I would have solemnized his death with deepest joy."

Bussy's banishment greatly crippled Alençon. He, meanwhile, was chafing at his State-confinement. He resolved to make his escape in spite of the close watch kept upon him, and to form an opposition party of Protestants and *Politiques* outside Paris. A rumour of his plans got abroad and there was talk of putting him in the Bastille. De Guast became more vigilant than ever, but with the crafty help of Marguerite, Alençon gave the Court the slip. His coach was still allowed him, and one evening he ordered it to take him

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to Monceaux, there to keep an assignation with his mistress. When he reached her house he went in, leaving his coach and guards at the front-door. They awaited his return in vain. Muffled in his cloak, he had passed out at the back, and there finding Simier and his colleagues, he rode off without more ado to Dreux, a town which belonged to him as the King's brother, by a special grant from the Crown. While he was galloping away from Paris, the unconscious King had sat down to dinner. He was still at table when the news was brought him. He leaped to his feet in a passion. His first thought was to send for his sister and cross-examine her. "She had not seen Alençon once all that afternoon," she answered demurely. "Bring him to me, alive or dead," thundered Henri, "he shall know what it means thus to thwart me." Margot retired, well-contented. She had carried out her purpose for Alençon, and, more than that, before he went, she had once more reconciled him to her husband. Their quarrel of gallantry was over and, as soon as possible, Navarre, the most important of allies, was to join him.

The moment was in many ways propitious for creating an Opposition movement. The exhausted Court party lived in dread of Germany and its threats of invasion, which might do much to strengthen the Protestants. When Alençon was once safe in his domains, he wrote in a bold tone to his brother. He had escaped, he said, "for the sake of his liberty and because he had been in daily expectation that His Majesty would take some resolution *moulded on the counsels of César Borgia*." The "*morceau Italianisé*" was then never far from the minds of Princes, nor was Alençon wrong to be wary. "Last evening," he wrote on one occasion, "they gave me wine at my meal, so well concocted that directly I had tasted it and given it to Thoré and others, we were overtaken by such sickness that without the goodness of God and the excellent remedies that were given us, the poison would have worked its will." For the moment the Prince was safe from such dangers, and he hastened to take practical measures. He wrote to Queen Elizabeth and to the Elector of Brandenburg for help; to the Pope and the Parlement to explain matters. On her side, Catherine was not idle. She tried to get five or six "trusty" agents sent to Alençon; first they were to promise him help, and next they were to arrest him. But her machinations were unavailing, and he remained beyond her power.

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His departure brought evil days to Marguerite, who had already suffered much on his behalf. One morning, soon after he had gone, she had risen from a wakeful bed, her eyes swollen with tears, and was preparing to go out in quest of news of the fugitive, when Catherine entered the room. Her coming was always of baleful import. This time it was to announce with elaborate diplomacy that her daughter was a prisoner—a hostage for her brother—and a captive she remained for weeks in the palace. It was to little purpose. The flame once alight, there was not much use in keeping the match that lighted it under lock and key. Serious danger threatened the kingdom. Alençon was busy amassing an army, and Navarre was helping him in secret. Catherine saw that her only course was to try and reconcile her son. She had more than one long parley with him, but each time, actuated perhaps more by self-interest than brotherly love, he made the freedom of his sister a condition of pacification. At last it became evident that Marguerite's presence was needful to induce him to come to terms, and that, since the hostile troops were increasing, it was expedient to release, and to use her. The Queen-Mother decided to take her to meet him, and interviews eventually took place both at Blois and at Chambord.

Alençon demanded and obtained the town of Blois as his place of residence—also the liberation of the Marshals Montmorency and Cossé, who had been prisoners since the Coconnas conspiracy. The Queen-Mother, it was said, had made a vain attempt to do away with Montmorency, whose presence was so important to the Huguenots; but whatever the truth of the report, she was now forced to set both her prisoners at large and to make the King cajole them with fine words.

It must have been a bitter task for Henri, for his love of the Huguenots had not grown. Earlier in his reign, when a deputation from them had approached him, "Your articles seem very strange to me—I wonder you dare present them," was all that he found to say. It was needful now that he should show tact. The reconciliation with Alençon had not put the hoped-for end to the dilemma, and Thoré and Méru, the younger of the Montmorency brothers, had broken out in open revolt in the South. Mayenne, the Catholic leader, backed by his brother, the Duc de Guise, met them and their forces; and a battle ensued at Dormans, which resulted in a Protestant defeat. It was a triumph for the Catholic chiefs and

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Guise had reason to be proud of the scar he got there. It earned him the name of *le Balafre*, already borne by his father before him.

The Protestants had now no choice but peace, and Catherine, who desired it above all things, set about the negotiations. It was concluded on November 8, 1575, but it had no enduring effect, and no one could have thought it would last long. Alençon did not cease his efforts to collect Mercenaries; and Condé, hitherto not prominent, supported by the Elector's son, Casimir, was marching from the Moselle towards the Loire. Alençon, never a good chieftain, was satisfied to follow their lead.

The moment was critical for France, and it was about this time, early in 1576, that Navarre contrived his departure from Paris. As in Alençon's case, the town had been busy with the event before its occurrence and, two days earlier, had already spread a report that he had gone. The King and his mother, who had not been seeing him, believed it; but the day after they had come to this conclusion, while they were worshipping at Sainte-Chapelle, he suddenly appeared before them, booted and spurred, and burst out laughing "in his accustomed manner." "I have brought you back," he said, "the man whom you were seeking, and for whose sake you were so much distressed." It would, he urged, have been easy for him to run away if he had wanted to, but the thought had never come into his head. And he had greatly wished to bring this home to them, so that henceforth they might harbour no such fancies; "they might feel sure that he would never leave their Majesties except by their own command, but would die . . . at their feet and in their service." "*Vrai trait de Gascon*," old Estoile calls this little scene, and in truth it was a victory of art; a carefully prepared dramatic effect to put his royal cousins off the scent. Henri de Navarre seems to be the only person in history who had as much wit and practical philosophy as the Scapins and the Mascarilles of Molière. But the plot of his comedy was serious. He played for a big game with a light heart.

He left Paris without raising any suspicion, ostensibly to hunt at Senlis. And he blinded the public still further by going there with the Duc de Guise, and stopping on the way, in his company, at the great Fair of Saint-Germain, which was then crowding the place. There, where he could be seen by all, he paraded with the Duke—"giving him many

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caresses . . . and holding him fast in his embrace for more than half a quarter of an hour." He entreated him, too, to come on and hunt at Senlis, "so that the people thought it boded well and that they were good friends and wholly reconciled." They judged rashly—"arguing from the length of his nose," so the Diarist tells us; but whatever that may mean, it proved an unreliable criterion.

It was easy enough to part from Guise at Senlis; and thence, without more waste of time, Navarre effected his real flight, attended only by a few followers. He spoke no word until he had crossed the Loire. "But as soon as he had crossed it, heaving a deep sigh and raising his eyes to Heaven, he spoke these words: 'God be praised, for that He hath delivered me. *They* were the death of my mother at Paris; *they* murdered the Admiral and all my noblest servants. And *they* would not have done much better by me if God had not preserved me. I would not return there if they dragged me.' Then once more jesting, with his wonted mirth, 'I only regret Paris,' said he, 'for the sake of two things I left behind there. The one is the Mass, the other is my wife. Well, as for the first, I must try to do without it. And I cannot and I will not have the second back again.'" This was Navarre's way of announcing that he had definitely re-joined the Church of the Huguenots, and that he had separated from Marguerite.

When he left Paris she was very ill in bed. "He went without saying good-bye"; this was his wife's only comment. The fact was that their disagreements had grown and Navarre felt that his wife's numerous love-affairs were making his name ridiculous. He dreaded, too, her dangerous gift for intrigue and what it might bring upon him. So he abandoned her to the petty resentments of the Court.

Marguerite was clever enough to hide any grudge she felt towards Henri III for his treatment of her. It suited his cards to make a truce with her and she showed no disposition to repel him. "So," she writes, "I acceded to his wishes, more from contempt of his insults than from any desire to give him pleasure. Indeed, I passed the time of my captivity in the joys of reading, the which then first began to delight me; and I felt that I owed this favour not to Fortune, but to Divine Providence, which, from that day onward, equipped me with this goodly cure for the healing of all the many cares laid up for me in the future."

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She was soon to have fresh need of her philosophy. Troubles were brewing round about her. Catherine, seeing peace already broken, resumed the methods she had once used at Poissy. She travelled to meet Condé, Alençon and Casimir, together with their army, at Chatenai, and took with her her "Flying Squadron" to try the effect of feminine charm. Navarre's love, Madame de Sauve, was of the band, besides the great Madame de Montpensier, and Madame Villequier. This last lady is only famous through her death. She was having a final taste of the life she loved. Next year her jealous husband put an end to her, and murdered her suddenly in cold blood, before the eyes of the assembled Court. But now, at Chatenai, she was still practising her wiles, and the soldiers began, says a chronicler, "to yield before so much ogling." Their leaders were more obdurate, and even dared ride rough-shod over Catherine. One day at a meeting with the rebels, she was whispering in Alençon's ear. "Madame, please speak out, so that every one may hear you," said one of them. "We do not allow whispering here."

As before, the Queen-Mother sought to make peace and, as before, she fulfilled her purpose. In May, 1576, was signed the Peace of the Château de Beaulieu. It was known as the *Paix de Monsieur*, Alençon's title as the King's next brother, and it represented his demands. This strange leader of the Protestants served them well and they came off with flying colours. They gained official recognition of their religion, and its free exercise in every town excepting Paris; the repeal of all decrees against them; the admission of their children to the schools; the creation of *Chambres mi-parties*, or councils made up practically of Moderates; the grant of no less than eight "strong places"; the rehabilitation of Coligny's memory and the restitution of his property to his children. Alençon made further terms for his own advantage with Henri. He was to have Touraine, Berri and Anjou added to his *apanage*¹ the term for the principality which was granted to him as the King's brother, and he was to bear the title of Duc d'Anjou.²

The negotiations for his marriage with Elizabeth had been re-opened in 1574, and after his flight from the Court

¹ An *apanage* meant an almost independent Principality.

² In order to avoid confusion, we shall continue to call him Alençon.

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they were carried on with redoubled vigour by Catherine who regarded them as a possible means of winning him back. Not that she hoped for much result from them. Everything around her was disheartening. The emptiness of the treasury was alarming, and she had to use all her resources to scrape together enough money to pay for the fulfilment of the treaty. A new race of money-lenders sprang up who paid great fortunes in return for *titres de noblesse*, and founded a solid plutocracy which was not unimportant in the future. In the meantime Casimir and his soldiers were clamouring for pay; as their due from the Peace, and in the dearth of current coin, some of the Crown jewels were sent off to them. "These things are unspeakable anguish," wrote Catherine, nor did she over-state the truth. "Whichever way we look, we see despair," so said one of her statesmen, and as yet no physician had appeared to cure the evil. There was not open war, but the spirit of insurrection was everywhere and disturbance permeated the kingdom. The only remedy for the stricken country was peace, and a real peace seemed still far off.

Catherine, bent upon securing it, did her best to conciliate her enemies. More practically important than Alençon, Condé or Navarre, was Damville, the second of the Montmorency brothers, the Governor of Languedoc and the leader of the *Politique* party. He had, said Catherine, "more of experience, understanding, and of sequence" than the others, and, without him, they "remained devoid of good counsel and of generalship." This personage she succeeded in cajoling for the moment. She next made advances to Navarre and offered to bring his wife back to him. Marguerite would at least work less mischief in Navarre than in Paris, and her mother was sanguine enough to believe that she could still turn her into her own tool. But Henri de Navarre thought differently and refused to see either his mother-in-law or his wife; nor did he give in to Catherine's wishes till a much later date.

He could afford to be strong, for he had a potent ally in Condé. That Prince refused to join hands with Alençon, whom he suspected of wishing to betray him to the King. Henri had special reasons for dreading him. Apart from the Cause of religion, Condé had a private grievance. The town of Péronne in Picardy had been promised to him, but when he wished to take possession of it, the Ligue of Picardy, a local Catholic

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federation, led by Humière, the Governor of the province, refused to yield it. The King was impotent, Condé malcontent ; nor was he appeased by receiving the town of St. Jean d'Angély in compensation. The incident, trifling in itself, has a permanent significance, because the Ligue of Picardy became the model on which, a few years later, so many other federations were formed, culminating in the Ligue which was later to revolutionize France.

Condé's disaffection, which should have strengthened the Opposition, only weakened it. His rejection of Alençon was a blunder, of which others were not slow to avail themselves. The Catholics of the Belgian Netherlands lost no time in coming forward and making proposals to him. It cost that Prince little to throw away his "principles" and desert the Protestants. He accepted the offers of the men who had till now been his foes ; but, before he did so, he met the King in consultation at Blois, where they were joined by Catherine. Here, in August, 1576, were held the *Etats de Blois*, which proved not only fatal to the establishment of peace, but a decisive step on that road of national disaster which the King was constructing bit by bit. With short-sighted obstinacy, he enforced a rigid Catholic uniformity and the suppression of Protestant worship. He was supported by nearly the whole assembly, and opposed almost alone by Catherine. It is at this moment that we recognize her force—that we see how much the kingdom deteriorated without her. Under Henri, the son who freed himself from her curbing rein, folly became confusion, and confusion worse confounded. She saw that at this juncture a policy of conciliation was all-important, and she keenly disapproved of the King's decision. At an interview with the Cardinal de Bourbon, she openly pronounced herself for peace. And she did more than this. She herself made a speech in the *Etats* which gives us her conception of herself. "I am a Catholic," it ran, "and have as good a conscience as any one can have. Often, in the time of the late King, my son, have I hazarded my person against the Huguenots. Nor do I yet feel any fear of them. I am ready to die, having reached fifty-eight years of age, and I hope to go to Paradise. I dare not *authorize* myself . . . to destroy this kingdom. If there be others who, so long as they can say, 'I have strictly maintained the Catholic faith,' care nothing for the ruin of this nation, or if there be any who hope to find their profit in its misery, then I have

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nothing to say, but I do not desire to be like them." Montpensier, the Catholic bigot, was statesman enough to support her in her advocacy of peace and tolerance, and such opinions, coming from him, made an immense effect upon his audience. But their efforts were useless. The King turned a deaf ear to his mother's counsels. He was longing for war, although he took care to get rid of the responsibility of his decisions, and to make the world believe that the *États* had forced his hand.

He daily drifted further from Catherine, wounding her to the quick by insisting, for the first time, upon opening his despatches himself, a course which was crippling to her power, shutting her out largely from foreign affairs and checking her influence at home. At first she had tried to hold him by the frivolous means that had once been so effective. "Persuade the King," she said to the Cardinal de Bourbon, "not to be so devout as he was at Avignon, where he never budged from the Jesuits"; and although it was Lent, she had comedies acted at Court—in spite of public denunciations from the pulpit. But her son had got beyond her. This "unspeakable anguish" had come upon her, and she was found in her closet crying bitterly, no one with her but the young Queen, Louise. Catherine had never before complained of her son; she did so now. "There is nothing that *I* do that he does not think all wrong," she exclaimed—"yet everybody can see that I cannot do what I would." The very men who were urging war upon him would, she knew, do nothing to help him. Evil would come upon France; she foresaw it, but she could not prevent it. A gentleman of the Court proposed the murder of Navarre as a short cut to peace and prosperity. "Beware of such a deed!" she exclaimed; "it will be quite enough to take him." Upon this, the King reproached her with partiality for "*le Béarnais*," and there were disputes between them. In the end she could not endure the grief of a difference with her "All." She sent him word that she gave her consent to religious uniformity throughout the realm, but she did not wish her decision to be publicly declared. The King paid her but scant attention. Other matters were pressing upon him. The deputies had supported him warmly upon religious affairs, but they did not follow suit in other matters. The Third Estate was protesting in loud tones against the influence of the Italians, and against the general maladministration, especially in ecclesiastical concerns.

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Worse than this, they refused to grant money by illicit methods, in spite of the King's extortionate demands. His Majesty cried with anger, but no one was moved by his tears.

This was an important result of the deputies' efforts. Another, and a greater, was that Henri put his name to the Ligue—the newly formed federation of the Catholic Nobles against the Protestants and the *Politiques*.

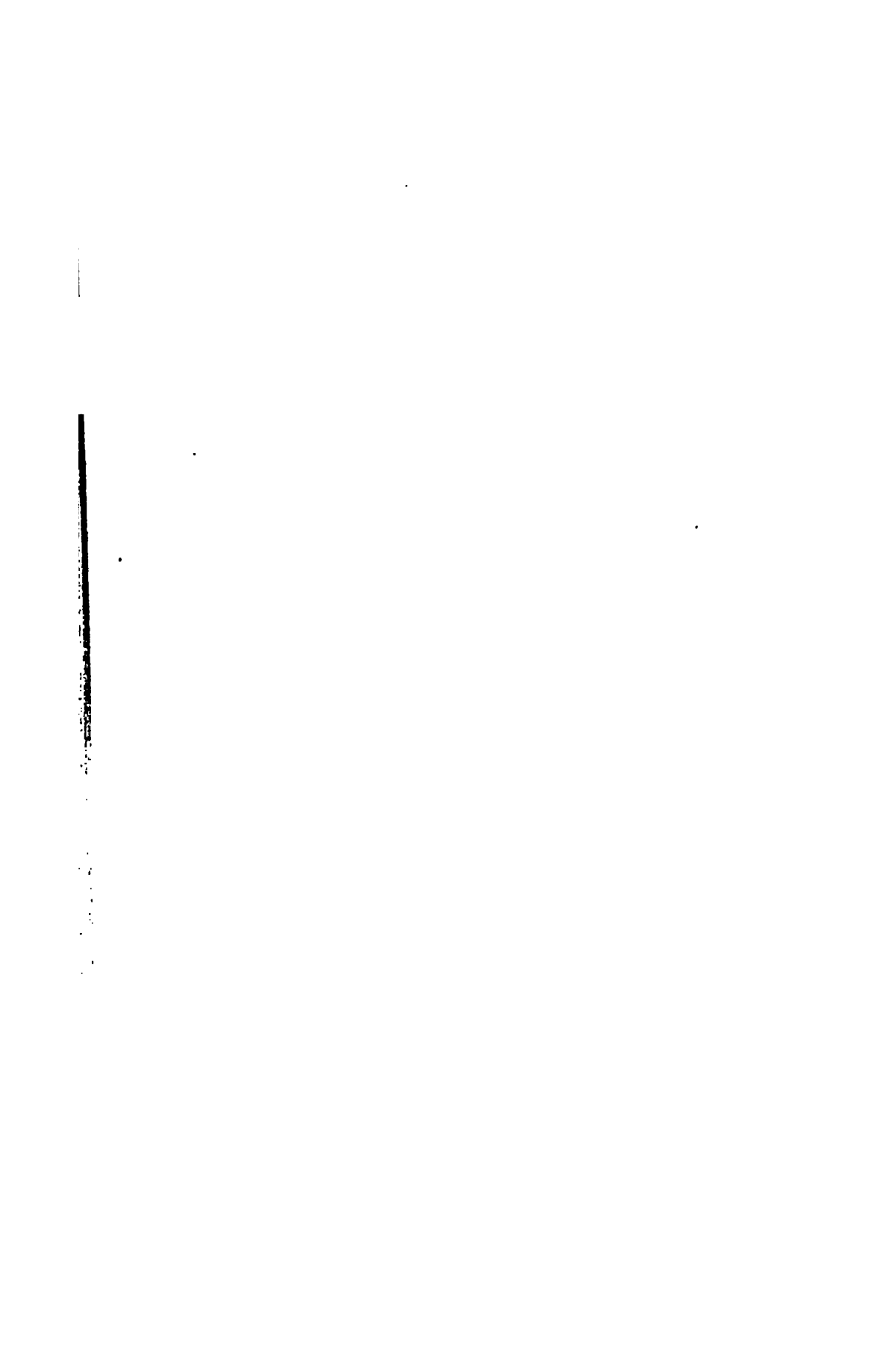
Unfortunately the Opposition was an easy prey for its adversaries. It had weakened itself by petty feuds. Condé was jealous of Navarre, and yet could not act alone. Navarre himself had not enough enthusiasm to be the leader of any cause. He had not the sinew to struggle, and he allowed the town of La Charité, which was being besieged by the now Catholic Alençon, to fall into that Prince's hands without attempting to go to its help. Other Protestant places fell before the enemy and there seemed little to hope from resistance. Damville thought discretion the better part of valour and not only submitted to the King, but was appointed "Chief of the Royal Troops." Navarre was not long in following his example. Catherine enjoyed an hour of triumph. She spent it in fêteing Alençon as a reward for his victory at La Charité, and in giving a masque which was like an orgy of late Rome presided over by Madame de Sauve. These frivolities did not impede the beginning of transactions for peace. The Queen-Mother was lucky in having the conciliatory spirit of Navarre to work with. Together they framed *la Paix de Bergerac*, which the King called *his* Peace, in opposition to the *Paix de Monsieur*. It was signed at Bergerac, on September 25, 1577.

It granted liberty of worship to the Huguenots in such places as were already Protestant—in certain other towns also, as well as in the houses of various great gentlemen and "feudatories," whose privileges were strictly defined. It created new Chambers with new advantages for the Protestants; it re-affirmed their possession of the "eight strong places" already assigned to them; and, for the rest, it followed the treaty of 1576. There was one important extra clause forbidding all meetings and associations which would in any way injure this pact—a provision directed against the Ligues: the Catholic Ligue already known to us, the Protestant Ligue which counterbalanced it. And there were private and less essential agreements with

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Navarre and Condé, promising Condé the future government of Picardy and according wished-for benefits to the Huguenots.

But no treaty could kill the Catholic Ligue. It was a force, and, being such, it was bound to live, as we shall have occasion to see hereafter.



CHAPTER XVI

In the Netherlands

A MIDST all these doings, fresh danger had been threatening France from the Netherlands and from their dealings with Alençon. And in order to trace how it arose, it is needful to give a backward glance at what had been happening in that country for the last five years. In 1573, Alva had retired to Spain. The goaded Protestants, encouraged by his absence, gained some ground, wearying the Spaniards by their dogged persistence. Spain arose and retaliated by defeating the troops of Louis of Nassau and killing their gallant leader. There followed, in 1574, the siege of Leyden and the desperate heroism of the Protestants, who bethought themselves of piercing the dams, and nearly drowned the Spanish army. The reigning Emperor, Maximilian, tried to act as mediator, but Philip refused to make concessions on the score of religion, and the attempt bore no fruit. The year 1575 found matters as embroiled as ever, and the Netherlanders, with fresh initiative, resolved to change their course. They offered the supreme administration of their country to the Prince of Orange, with a Council of twenty-one to help him, a form of government which he duly accepted. Their measures only served to redouble the power of the Spaniards, and the sack of Antwerp, with all its unreadable horrors, took place in 1576.

The parties in the State were complicated. It must be borne in mind that there were two main groups of rebels—the Protestants and the old Catholic nobility—both equally up in arms against Spain. Their common enmity turned these natural foes into allies, and they made a formal pact, the Treaty of Ghent. It decreed that there should be freedom of worship for the Catholics in the Protestant provinces, and that, in the Catholic domains, the Protestants should have liberty of conscience, although no public exercise of their faith was allowed them. This agreement was signed, and put in

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practice in 1576. The same year, Don John of Austria, the illegitimate son of Charles V, was sent to the Low Countries as Governor. He began at once to carry out a crafty policy and to conciliate the great Catholic nobles. The Treaty of Ghent was soon broken, and the Protestants, left high and dry, were thrown upon their own resources. Undismayed, they continued the struggle, won several unimportant successes, and made William of Orange Governor of Brabant. The Nobles retorted by summoning a counter-Governor, the Archduke Matthias, brother of Maximilian's successor, Rudolph, one of those strange royal factotums, ready for any vicarious sovereignty, of whom Europe in that age seemed prolific. The Prince of Orange, without a demur, accepted the Archduke's supremacy, but took care to get himself made Lieutenant-General, and so remained the real ruler.

It was upon these events that the Netherlands reverted to their tradition of French intervention and invited first the King, who refused, then Alençon, to come to their aid. Other powers were on the watch to get a footing in their country. Queen Elizabeth had long been wavering, but now she made a discovery which decided her. Don John, she found, had been plotting for no less a prize than Mary Stuart. To free her, to marry her, and then to dethrone Elizabeth, were the main points of his programme. Elizabeth, doubting no longer, promised troops to the Protestants, the more gladly that she was ready to do anything to prevent the interference of the French. Casimir was another of the Princes with whom the Netherlands opened negotiations, so that Alençon's desire to accept their offer received all the stimulus of rivalry.

Two months after the conclusion of the *Paix de Monsieur* (in 1576), he had returned to the Court, with his mother and his sister. The King received them "with a great show of joy" at the pacification of his kingdom, but he was angry at the concessions to the Huguenots, and, in his heart, as Marguerite shrewdly observes, he was only longing for the renewal of the war. He counted on his brother's return as the surest means of promoting it. To Alençon's face, however, he was all smiles, and he even gave the hated Bussy a suave welcome. When the offer came from the Low Countries, Catherine, as usual believing that she could subject her children to her will and foreseeing great possibilities for France from the Netherlandish scheme, appeared to support it warmly. The King at first also feigned sympathy, but the feint was transparent. Jealous

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and afraid of any influence that might accrue to his brother, he was doing all he could to harry and to hamper him, and he even warned Philip against him.

The project roused new ambitions in Alençon. Like Coligny, he dreamed of empire in the Netherlands, an empire to be increased by marriage with Elizabeth—but, unlike Coligny, the end that he sought was his own advantage. The struggle he knew would be a hard one, but the goal was not unattainable. And if he had potent enemies, he also had one ally—a host in herself—and that was his sister, Marguerite. Happily for him, she too had a fresh grievance against the King which spurred her on to weave her webs, in vengeance. According to her own account, now that Catholics and Huguenots were reconciled, her Protestant husband had but one desire, and that was to see her again. It is impossible not to doubt this. The truth probably was that he wished to prevent her doing mischief to his interests at Court, and was anxious to have her under his eye. But, whatever his motive, it was his policy that required her, not his heart. Catherine, when informed of his wish, tried to divert her daughter from fulfilling it, and the King at first put him off by proposals to accompany her as far as Poitiers. He wanted, she thought, by thus dallying, to gain time until the war should be resumed, for if Navarre once more became the national foe, she could not ask to be sent back to him. But when a second messenger came from her husband to demand her, Henri lost his temper and refused outright. "He turned away Genissac, the Huguenot," she writes, "who was sent by my husband to hasten my departure, and gave him rude words with many threats, saying, that it was to a Catholic he had given his sister, not to a Huguenot; that if my husband wished to have me, he must become a Catholic. I went straight to my mother's closet, where the King was at the moment. I represented to him that I had not married for pleasure, or even of my own free will, but at the command of my brother Charles, and of my mother, and himself; that, since they had given me to him, they could not hinder me from sharing his fortunes; that I wished to do so, and if they did not allow me to, I should steal off and contrive to get to him somehow, were it even at the hazard of my life. 'It is now,' replied the King, 'no longer the time to importune me to let you go. I confess that what you charge me with is true—that I made delays on purpose, so that at last I might refuse you altogether; for since the day when the King of Navarre again

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turned Huguenot, I have never approved of your rejoining him. No, in truth, you shall not go ; and if you try to steal off, as you say, please take note that you will have your mother and me for cruel enemies and that we will compel you to feel our enmity as much as we can. So, you see, you would be making things worse, instead of better for your husband.' ”

After such threats, the transactions with the Low Countries came most opportunely for Marguerite, and she enjoyed them the more, because, to avoid the King's scrutiny, the strictest secrecy concerning them was needful. She urged Alençon to help the Netherlanders against Spain ; and she saw, with her usual astuteness, that the scheme offered a new field for her powers. The Flemish agent, Mondoucet, who was the bearer of fresh offers to Alençon, suggested a practical proposal which was probably inspired by her. Civil war had by this time broken out again, and her friends had been persuading her to leave the Court. A place so hostile to her husband was, they said, no fitting place for her. One of these confidantes, the Princesse de la Roche-sur-Yonne, was about to travel to Spa to take the waters there, and Spa could only be reached through the Netherlands. When the two ladies were discussing their plans, the Fleming, Mondoucet, happened to be present. “ Monsieur,” he said to Alençon, “ if the Queen of Navarre could pretend to have some illness which the waters of Spa could do good to, it would be exceedingly *à propos* to your enterprise in Flanders, where she could strike a grand blow for you.” “ My brother very much approved of this, and was sincerely glad of the opening. All of a sudden, he exclaimed, ‘ Oh, Queen, seek about no longer ; you must go to the waters at Spa, whither Madame la Princesse de la Roche-sur-Yonne is travelling. In old days I noticed that you had erysipelas in your arm. You must say that at that time the doctors ordered you the waters, but it was not the proper season ; that now the right moment has come and you beg the King to let you go.’ ” She was, in fact, to be Alençon's unofficial spy ; she would give him an idea how the land lay and prepare the road he was to tread.

In the meantime, the King, anxious to circumscribe his brother's actions and to ruin his prospects with the Huguenots, gave him the command of one of the two armies against them, himself supervising the other : an injury, in the guise of an honour, which Alençon dared not refuse. He therefore found himself fighting against his own party while his sister was

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sounding them in Flanders on his behalf. He trusted to her powers of invention to explain away his treachery. All happened just as they wished. The King and Catherine made no objection to a journey for the sake of health, and Marguerite set off. Her description of the start and its full Renaissance splendour is characteristic of herself. "I rode," she says, "in a litter made with pillars. They were covered with velvet of Spanish ruby colour, embroidered with opal silk and gold, and worked with devices. This litter was lighted with windows, and the panes, too, were wrought with devices, some on the lining and some on the glass—forty mottoes in all, every one of them different, now in Spanish and now in Italian, and they told about the sun and its effects. The which was followed by the litter of Madame de la Roche-sur-Yonne, and by that of Madame de Tournon, my lady-in-waiting; and by ten maids-of-honour on horseback, and their Governess also; and by six coaches, or chariots, with the rest of her ladies and of mine."

The passage through Flanders was as eventful as her expeditions were wont to be. She made amusement expedient and expediency amusing, intermingling feasts and business so adroitly that very few could tell which was which. Nor did she ever cease from labouring for Alençon with a vigilance and patience that were really disinterested, although her energetic love of intrigue had something to say in the matter. Those who were wavering in allegiance to Spain she converted to her cause. And she cast her spells over the old Flemish *Noblesse*, who were one and all anti-Spanish, and pledged them to support her brother. She so fascinated the Governor of Cambrai that he deserted his duties and accompanied her all the way to Namur; while Monsieur de Lalain, the Governor of Valenciennes, a relation of Count Egmont's and the arch-foe of Philip, became her devoted servant. His wife was both useful and congenial to her. "The nature of the Flemings," she writes, "is to be familiar, joyous, and intimate; and the Comtesse de Lalain shared this temperament. But more than this, she had a great and lofty spirit . . . the which gave me sudden assurance that it would be easy to knit close ties of friendship with her, which might serve the advancement of my brother's schemes, since she entirely possessed the mind of her husband."

The Queen of Navarre remained a week in this lady's house at Mons, on the most confidential terms with her. Margot

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made the most of the attachment, especially at her *Coucher*, at which the Countess "always lingered late." But it was at meal-times that the Siren diplomat—so she tells us—did most business, "for then it was that the people of Flanders were wont to talk with the greatest frankness." Her vital pen has left us a picture of one of these dinners—a *genre* picture of the palace—which is worth preserving: not that it bears upon any important issue, but because, for the moment, it makes us see with her eyes the strange domestic life of the Renaissance in all the force of its crude contrasts.

The Comtesse de Lalain, she says, "would have stayed on still longer at my *Coucher*, but she had a habit, uncommon enough among persons of her quality, and one which shows a great and natural goodness. She nursed her little son herself. And the next day at a banquet, where she was seated next me at table, in full dress covered with jewels . . . (her robe being of black and gold tissue *à l'Espagnole* . . . with a gold and silver-broidered stomacher and big diamond buttons), they brought her her baby, all swaddled as richly as his Nurse, that she might feed him. This she did, and first, while she kept him waiting, she set him between us on the table. In another it might have seemed uncivil, but she achieved it with such grace and simplicity that she received as great praise for what she did as the company had pleasure from her action."

After Marguerite had got all she wanted from this unconscious precursor of Rousseau's school, she paid her with presents and departed. All these dealings were but the preliminaries to her meeting at Namur with Don John, the representative of Philip upon her power of blinding whom so much of Alençon's success depended. When he received her outside the town, he seemed as dazzling a vision as herself: the opposite of his brother, Philip—golden-haired and of an open countenance—a man who would be worth the conquering. The curtains of her litter were undrawn; he advanced, and she saluted him *à la Française*, with a kiss; then he "rode back to the city by my side, talking the whole of the way, and we did not arrive until nightfall." Her reception was magnificent, her apartments regal. Her bed was curtained with tapestries—the gift of a vanquished Pasha—illustrating Don John's victories over the Ottoman Empire. The days that followed passed in the accustomed display, in balls and fireworks. Don John was an hidalgo of courtesy: Margot put forth all her

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attractions. But it is not probable that he was deceived, and she left him, as she found him, her opponent.

Ill-luck pursued her after she left Namur. Her favourite maid-of-honour died suddenly—as ladies then died, of unrequited love ; then, upon the last stage of her journey, the Meuse rose and submerged her boats as well as the place where she was staying. There followed six weeks of revels at Liège, whither the waters from Spa were brought her daily, and where “ we passed the day together, dining out at some banquet or other, or going first to a ball, then to Vespers in some house of religion.” But this gay season ended with inauspicious omens. Despatches reached her from her brother to announce that the King had detected her design in going to Flanders and was now conspiring with Don John to thwart her. She was to be taken prisoner, either by the Spaniards or by the Huguenots, who were by this time bitter towards Alençon for taking arms against them. He had fortunately warned her in time. She succeeded in meeting strategy with strategy ; and although she was once nearly trapped, she ended by outwitting her enemies and returning in safety to France.

At La Fère, in Picardy, she met Alençon, and there they spent two months together, receiving deputations to the Netherlands, concerting, debating, concealing. The result of all the talk was his acceptance of the proposals received from the Anti-Spanish Catholics of Flanders. Later, in 1578, a few unimportant victories on Don John's part induced them to emphasize their summons to Alençon and to tempt him with a larger bribe than before. He ratified his consent to their offers, and all that now remained to be done was to fulfil the solemn pledge that he had given.

The Peace of Bergerac had by now been concluded, and Marguerite and her brother had returned once more to Paris and the Court. Marguerite, at least, was well received ; pretended approval was showered upon her, and when she repeated her request to join her husband, the King feigned willingness to grant it. But it soon became clear that he was as inimical as ever to both herself and Alençon ; that if he caught wind of the Netherlandish scheme, he would ruin them. And their mother, who could not long withstand him, was at one with him again on this matter. Secrecy on their part was essential.

The King began a campaign against them, the petty persecution of which was soon aggravated by his favourites. It

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reached its crisis at a Court Ball, given in honour of a nobleman's wedding. The ball-room was crowded. Alençon was dancing with the bride. The Mignons chose this moment to approach him with loud gibes upon his ugliness. It had not been worth his while, they said, to dress himself up; he had done well to come after dark when he could not be properly seen. And they mocked at the smallness of his stature in tones that could clearly be heard by the lady on his arm.

The Prince danced no more that evening. He left the room with rage in his heart, resolved to lose no time in quitting Paris. Next day, he sent word to the King to ask leave to go out of town for a few days and hunt. Henri, spurred on by the Mignons, refused his permission. He was seized by an access of irrational fear. "And suddenly he went in night-attire to find my mother," writes Margot, "moved and shaken as in some public alarm." When Catherine remonstrated, "'How can you ask me, Madame,' he cried, 'to let my brother go and hunt? I have no doubt that beneath the pretext of the chase there lurks some perilous enterprise. I will go and seize him and all his people, and I will have his coffers searched. I feel sure we shall discover something important.' And she, all in undress as she was, wrapping her bedgown round her as best she could, followed him up the stairs to my brother's bedchamber. The King knocked roughly at the door and my brother woke with a start." He bade them enter, and Henri went in and, sending away his brother's valets, began to storm at him. He had his coffers rifled and himself searched the bed for papers.

Alençon had upon him a letter from Madame de Sauve, and, wishing to keep it private, he put his hand over it. The King demanded it—Alençon refused, entreating him with clasped hands not to ask for it. Henri insisted the more, imagining that he had lighted upon an incriminating political paper. But when he opened it in his mother's presence, both of them, perceiving their blunder, stood there covered with confusion, and the King was more wroth than ever. It was in vain that Alençon asked the reason of his conduct; the King would not reply. The truth was that he had got some idea of the Prince's designs upon the Netherlands, and he saw that the only remedy was to turn lock and key upon him. Without more ado, he gave orders for his arrest and left him under the guard of a certain M. de Losse. That gentleman had been an old friend of Henri II's and tutor to Navarre, and

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was well disposed towards his prisoner. Perhaps it was owing to him that when the Prince asked as a favour that his sister should be allowed to share his imprisonment, the petition was granted.

Although it was still dark, Alençon, excited and distraught, desired her presence at once. It was daybreak when Losse sent one of his Scotch archers to fetch her. "This soldier came into my room," she wrote, "and found me still asleep, ignorant of what had happened. He drew my bed-curtain, and in the language used by the Scots,—'Good day, Madame,' he said—'Monsieur your brother begs that you will come and see him.' I was still dazed with sleep, and I stared at the man, for I thought that I was dreaming. Then recognizing him, I asked whether he were not one of the Scotch Guards. He replied that he was. 'But what do you want?' I said, 'has not my brother some other messenger he [could send me in your place?'] He answered that this was impossible; that the Prince's followers had been taken away; and he went on, in his own tongue, to tell me what had happened in the night." When Marguerite heard that her brother needed her, she hastened to dress herself and accompany her escort. It was now morning. To reach Alençon's apartments she had to cross a courtyard thronged with servants and courtiers, the people who were wont to cringe before her. But now they all turned away their faces; the whole palace knew what had happened; she was already a person in disgrace whom it was dangerous to know. Alençon's welcome restored her calm. "When he saw me, his face showed more joy than sorrow. 'My Queen,' he said, as he embraced me, 'do not cry. . . . I despise their tyranny so long as you will have the goodness to help me by your presence.' These words, far from stopping my tears, made me think that I was pouring forth all the vapours of my life. I answered, sobbing, that my existence and my fortune were tied to his."

While this strange pair were weeping and conspiring, Bussy, now the victim of the Mignon Caylus's hatred, was sent to the Bastille. Catherine saw that matters had gone too far—that unless the King undid his work, the whole of Paris would be embroiled. But, as usual, she refused to bear the burden of opposing him. She called a Council of the Princes, Lords, and Marshals, "who," says Margot, had been "marvellously scandalized" by his behaviour. Armed with their verdict—that His Majesty must now mend matters as quickly and as

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well as he could—she succeeded in seriously alarming him. Alençon and Margot were summoned before him and restored to favour ; Bussy was fetched from the Bastille and requested to embrace Caylus in public. Entering with a gallant swagger, he gave him a kiss à la Pantalon, which “ made the whole Court burst out laughing.” By that time everybody was hungry, for “ nobody had eaten for three hours,” and Catherine, tired of emotions, proposed to have a family dinner, to be followed by a ball. She took no notice of Alençon's and Marguerite's black looks, but sent them, like naughty children, now forgiven, to change their dresses, “ which were suited to their woeful state,” and to put on more festive attire. The banquet can hardly have been pleasant. “ We obeyed her,” said Margot, “ as far as our clothes went, but as for our countenances, the mirrors of our souls, they showed a very passion of displeasure, imprinted there by the anger and disdain that we had felt at every act of this tragi-comedy.”

The “ tragi-comedy ” did not end there. It had created a new grudge in the heart of Alençon, and a new scene was still to follow. The King, true Valois that he was, went back upon his word and again became a prey to panic. He gave fresh orders that the palace doors should be watched, that his brother should be kept a semi-prisoner. Alençon was goaded into action. The time for delay had passed. He would escape and make his way to Flanders.

It was his sister who had all the resources. An exit by the usual doors was impossible. The Guards scrutinized the face of every person who went out of the Louvre. He must be let down, she decided, from her window, which was upon the second floor and looked out upon the moat. The necessary rope was the difficulty. She bethought herself that one of her mattresses wanted mending. “ That very day I had it carried off as if to be repaired, by a boy who was devoted to me ” (of such the Reine Margot had a store)—“ and, a few hours afterwards, he brought it back with the rope inside it.”

Her difficulties were not over. The escape was to be made at night. That evening the King dined *maigre*, alone, and Margot supped with her mother. Alençon was incautious enough to approach her at the table and whisper in her ear. He begged her to come to him quickly ; there were enemies abroad—he feared detection. In point of fact, there was at that moment a gentleman in the room who was in low and earnest colloquy with Catherine. Marguerite, whose senses,

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so she tells us, were intensified by her anxiety, knew at once that suspicion was in the air ; her mother's face changed as he talked. Then she rose and summoned her daughter to her closet. " Did you hear what Monsieur was telling me ? " she asked in haste : " You know that I pledged my word to the King that your brother would not go away, and now I have just been told that he will not be here to-morrow." Margot sailed between Scylla and Charybdis. " I found myself in such perplexity," she writes with pious casuistry, " that if God had not helped me, my manner would have revealed all that I was seeking to hide. But God aids good intentions, and His divine mercy worked in this matter to save my brother. I so much composed my countenance and words that she could know nothing of my resolve, nor did I offend my conscience by false oaths." " Did Catherine not know the gentleman and his mischievous spite against Alençon ? " Margot asked. " Had the Prince conceived such a plan, he would certainly have confided it to her, from whom he had never concealed anything. If he escaped, she would answer for him with her life." " Consider well what you are saying," rejoined Catherine—" you *will* answer for it with your life." But she did not probe Margot's words more closely ; again, perhaps, trusting too much to her powers of intimidation. " That is just what I wish," replied her daughter, and she smiled and bade her mother " Good-night." When she reached her own room she undressed and went to bed, but as soon as her ladies, with the exception of three, had gone away, she rose again and, together with Alençon, tied the rope she had procured to a great stick. Then, helped by her women and the boy who had already served her, she let down into the moat below, first Alençon, who laughed and jested all the time, then his colleague, Simier, who was shaking with fear, and last of the three, his valet. Alençon got off safely, and ran to Sainte-Geneviève, where Bussy was awaiting him. The old Abbot there received them kindly, and allowed them to make a hole in the abbey-wall by means of which they escaped into the country and travelled in safety to Angers.

Margot's course was not so smooth. When the last fugitive, the valet, had descended, a man suddenly sprang up in the moat and began to run hard towards the Guard-house—a spy, she thought, set there by the person who had that evening been conferring with Catherine. But happily her fears were not fulfilled ; nothing further happened from that source,

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and the inopportune appearance in the moat was never explained. The next peril came from the incriminating rope, which her ladies hastened to burn. Unfortunately it set the chimney on fire, and the sentinel arrived thundering at the door, demanding instant admission that he might extinguish the flames. Her women whispered that their mistress was asleep—that all was safe—that they could manage for themselves—and eventually they got rid of him. He was not their last visitor. Before daybreak, came M. de Losse with a message from the King. Marguerite was to make no delay to come before him and Catherine.

Most of the scenes in that strange family seem to have taken place at night. Did the Queen of Navarre, as, lightly clad, she now hastened to her mother, remember the fatal night of her interview with Henri de Guise, and of King Charles's attack upon her? She found King Henri sitting at the foot of his mother's bed in a towering passion. Both abused her as a promise-breaker. God, she assures us, now as always, showed His approval of her and gave her strength to keep her head. She replied that she had been deceived by Alençon as much as they were; that His Majesty need have no fear; she felt certain her brother had only retired to mature his plans for the Netherlands. The answer had such a specious semblance of frankness that it mollified Henri, and he allowed her to go in peace. Such an impolitic confession, wrung from her by necessity, must, he thought, be veracious. And if this motive alone had impelled Alençon's escape, he could stop the scheme now as he had stopped it before. A letter from the Prince confirmed everything that Marguerite had said, and the King acted accordingly. Under the pretence of supporting his brother, Henri spared no effort to undermine his project and to prevent his collecting an army.

Catherine did not remain passive—her energy dominated still. She made her usual attempt at conciliation and set off to parley with Alençon at Angers. Bussy met her and was about to escort her to the Château where her son was lodged, when she suspected that some trap had been laid for her. She might, she said, be kept a prisoner, as he had been, in the Louvre—she preferred to stay in the town. The next day, as Alençon did not come to her, she put away her pride and went to him. His welcome was a cold one. She was not admitted at the main entrance, but was requested—for the first time in her life—to pass in through a humble wicket-gate;

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and Alençon, pretending to have dislocated his leg, refused to receive her standing. He was carried to meet her in a chair, and he sat in it during their interview. But Catherine showed no sign of weakness. Her manner remained unruffled, and she feigned content with the results of her transaction.

"I have been a month away from the Court, running after my son," she writes to the Duchesse de Nemours: "He often gives me great anxiety lest he should again play the madman. But God be thanked, I found him so resolved (or so he says) to do nothing to displease his brother or break the peace, that if his deeds square with his words, the kingdom and I shall have cause to be grateful to Providence. He says that he wants to stay for some time in his own domains. The King and his wife, thank Heaven, are better than I ever saw them and have gone to dance in the town, as they do every Sunday and Thursday."

She and Henri had reckoned without their host. They had no idea how far Alençon's preparations had already advanced, or how impotent they now were to check him. Marguerite's reply to the King had been a master-stroke of tact; it just gave the Prince the needful time to complete his arrangements and to get his troops together. In July, 1578, he marched into Flanders with fanfaronnades and flourishes of trumpets.

His fortunes there were neither fruitful nor glorious, and can be briefly told. The Protestants had, ere this, made a virtue of necessity and, since they had no other leader, they had forgiven him his former defections. Once more they made common cause with the old Flemish *Noblesse*, but only to fall out with them again, soon after Alençon's arrival. The *Noblesse* asked him to be their leader—he consented with many fair promises. On August 15, the Flemings concluded a formal alliance with him, declaring him the Defender of their liberties, and pledging their word that if ever again they had a Prince, they would give him the preference. Besides this promise, he was to have every town that he took on the right bank of the Meuse and three "strong places" into the bargain. A great opportunity was in his hands, and other hands than his would have grasped it. The Flemings believed in him as their saviour, and, under his flag, were ready to lose life and fortune. He had a kingdom to make, and he lost it.

The country was full of Casimir's troops, of French, and of English soldiers also—a lawless and polyglot crowd which was devouring the land. In October 1578, Don John had died.

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It was rumoured that he was poisoned by Philip, but there was probably no truth in the story. He was succeeded by an abler Governor and more formidable adversary, Alexander Farnese, Duke of Parma. Alençon's fictitious energy faded; his boastful speeches turned to dust. The footlight effects of the play were over, and for the real drama he did not care. Marguerite did. She would have made a finer thing of the whole affair, and her gallant diplomacy in Flanders had merited better results. Alençon took two towns in the Low Countries, and no more. With that achievement, his farcical campaign was ended. In January, 1579, he abandoned the disillusioned Flemings, and returned to France, to rest upon his laurels.

CHAPTER XVII

The Journeys of Catherine

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THE return of Alençon was as theatrical as the rest of his doings. Hardly had he reached French soil, when, as the Venetian envoy puts it, "the Holy Ghost touched his heart." "Whereupon he said to Bussy that his departure from the Court had taken place privily by night, with scarcely a follower and almost as if he were a fugitive—that it had given rise to too much talk and lawful suspicion. And so, to do away with this impression, he thought he ought to go back the same way—to wit, by night and secretly, with few attendants, and as one who flees. . . . His Highness therefore came to the Louvre at one o'clock at night, about the time the King was going to bed. His arrival was so unexpected that His Majesty could scarcely believe in it ; but, seeing his brother before him, he kissed him with the greatest affection. They mingled their tears together, and they went to sleep, not only in the same room, but in the same bed. The next day the King called his Council together that he might tell them the good tidings, embracing his brother thereafter, in the sight of all the world."

Alençon did not long remain inactive. In a short while he resumed his broken relations with Queen Elizabeth, and the game of matrimony again began between them. But its course was as tardy as heretofore and gave time for a good deal to happen.

The King was allowing things to go from bad to worse. He lived in a world so fictitious that he refused to believe in disagreeables. He would not so much as listen to an official report of a riot, "*de peur d'entendre la vérité de la chose.*" He was absorbed in planning pastimes for his Mignons. But no amusement could keep them from brawling and Nemesis overtook them: De Guast had already perished. Saint-Mesgrin, Maugiron and Caylus were to follow. It was in April, 1578, that, loitering in the courtyard of the Louvre, they seized

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upon a trifling pretext for a quarrel with some other courtiers. There was a fight in which Maugiron was killed and Caylus dangerously wounded. He lingered for several days; and the King, says an old Diarist, "went every day to see him, and did not stir from the head of his bed, promising a hundred thousand crowns to the surgeons who bandaged him, if they would only make him recover. And he promised another hundred thousand to this same fine Mignon, to give him the courage to get well. Notwithstanding which promises, Caylus passed from this world to the next, having ever the words, 'Oh, my King, oh, my King!' upon his lips, which he uttered even with his last breath, with great strength and a deep regret. Nor did he make mention of God, or of his mother. In truth, the King bore towards him and Maugiron a wondrous affection. He kissed them both as they lay dead, and he had their heads shaved, that their fair hair might be carried off and locked away. And he took Caylus's ear-rings from his ears, the very ones that he himself had given, and fastened in with his own hands." The body of Caylus and also that of Maugiron lay in State, as if they had been the bodies of monarchs. Their deaths, like their lives, cost a fortune. That year, too, died the third Mignon, Saint-Mesgrin, the lover of the Duchesse de Guise. He was killed by masked men, at the bidding of her husband, one night as he came out of the Louvre. Assassination had become commonplace in Paris.

It was after the disappearance of these favourites that two new ones rose into prominence—Epernon and Joyeuse—destined to play more potent parts than any of their predecessors. Henri was never long inconsolable and his violent grief was soon assuaged. The devising of fresh dissipations and religious pageants was sufficient to distract him from his loss.

The most successful of these diversions was perhaps his creation of the Order of the Saint-Esprit, a Brotherhood of aristocrats with magnificent dresses and without any duties, originally invented to keep the restive Guise in loyal temper, he being among the first Knights to be enrolled. There was a great deal of talk about defence of the Catholic faith. Vast sums were spent to no purpose. The installation of the Order makes one of the most sumptuous episodes of an extravagant reign. The King demanded two hundred thousand crowns (to be raised upon Church property) as an endowment for his new fraternity. The Pope replied that his conscience



LE DUC D'EPERNON.
BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE.
ANONYME.

From a photograph by A. Giraudon.



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would not allow this concession ; and, as Henri persisted in his doings, the Nuncio was refused the Papal permission to be present at the ceremony. He was not missed amidst the general splendour. The Church of the Augustines was full of glittering Princes and Princesses. The Chevaliers of the Saint-Esprit walked two and two, in black velvet mantles "bordered with golden lilies and tongues of fire," and in "capotes of green satin sown over with silver doves," their collars made up of golden crosses and the interlaced initials of the King, with the lilies of France at the corners. And "from the middle of the collar hung a silver dove descending from heaven, with St. Michael upon the reverse side." The King came last, and the Heralds from the Provinces walked before him, "in shoes of black velvet all sprinkled with lilies of gold." "After High Mass, the Knights took the Sacrament, excepting one who, because of chronic malady, was obliged to have food every two hours. This service over, there was a superb banquet, and the King sat alone at a table. . . . After which was sung the Mass for the Dead."

This occasion was not graced by the presence of Marguerite or Catherine. As soon as Marguerite dared, she represented to the King that now that there was peace between the sects, her place was by her husband's side and that she desired to join him in Gascony. Her brother and her mother, to her surprise, consented, but the condition that they made soon explained their affability. Catherine was to accompany her and to deliver her into Navarre's hands. Thus began the first of those wonderful journeys of pacification which occupied Catherine's energies for the next three years and showed her at her best to the world.

All her will was bent upon peace. For nearly twenty years it had been the goal of her strenuous efforts. "Peace with dishonour" might have been her constant motto, for peace at any price seemed in her eyes the one chance of the continued sovereignty of her family. It is impossible not to admire the indomitable spirit with which, as she grew older, she pursued her object in the face of every hardship, every obstacle. Between 1578 and 1581 she knew no repose. Driven by her purpose, she was continually traversing France, amidst perils and discomforts unimaginable. So heavy in person that motion meant suffering, she was always on the move ; so rheumatic that acute pain was chronic, she uncomplainingly braved every kind of climate. Now she was carried in her

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litter under a burning sun ; now she was snowed up for weeks, amid all the bodily privations and the difficulties of getting provisions that winter in the country then signified. No fatigue was too great, no falsehood too black, if only she could achieve her end. She performed feats of diplomacy, curbing her violent temper, flattering the *Politiques*, soothing the Protestants : giving prizes to her enemies with her right hand, while her left, which always knew what the right was doing, hid the rod behind her back. "She gives audience while she dresses, while she eats—I had almost said 'while she sleeps,'" says an Ambassador, "and she listens to every one with an air of gaiety." She was no grumbler and she seldom makes mention of her distresses. But there is one letter of hers, written in the following year, which gives some idea of her experiences. It is addressed to her friend, the Duchesse d'Uzès.

"If it were not for the plague," it runs, "I would bring you news of your estate, but Uzès and all its neighbourhood is so very much infected that the birds flying past the place fall dead. This has made me take the other road, between the lakes and the sea ; and there we had to spend two nights in tents, camping thus in the service of my King, whom I long to see again in good health. As for me, mine is good, excepting that Porte-Sainte-Marie has given me an irritating catarrh which, at this moment, has turned to sciatica. However, this does not prevent my walking ; not so well, though, but that I am forced to have a little mule to ride, when I want it. I think that the King would laugh if he saw me upon it, for all the world like the Maréchal de Cossé. But if one goes on living, one must grow old, and really one is very lucky not to feel it more. You have to ride in a carrying-chair, I upon a mule, because I like to fare farther than you do. Tell me that when I come back I shall be welcome."

Her epic journey, ostensibly taken to restore Marguerite to her husband, kept the Queen-Mother away from Paris for eighteen months. "It seems to me," she wrote to her Intendant of Finance, "that one ought to leave everything else, and to invent any kind of means to avoid the storm (of war). I am resolved . . . not to return till I see peace. I shall infinitely pity all my trouble in coming if I return like a wrecked ship without its rigging ; but if God give me the grace to fulfil my desires, I hope that this kingdom will feel the good of my labours and that enduring peace will reign there."

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The work before her was of Herculean nature ; a reconciliation with Navarre : the settlement of the South of Guienne, of Languedoc, Provence and the Dauphiné, the pacification of quarrels between many sects of either faith, and of disputes between *Communes* and Nobles ; the dealing with provincial Lignes, were among the items of her programme. She and her daughter started in August, 1578, with a gay and impressive train. For *corps diplomatique*, she took with her the whole " Flying Squadron " ; and a peripatetic Cabinet, changeable at her will, was also with her. The Cardinal de Bourbon was of it, and La Mothe-Fénélon, and Jean de Foix, and Pibrac, Marguerite's Chancellor, as well as her secretary, Lanssac. They were men of crafty counsel rather than of strength, and one and all were her subordinates.

Not so the men she came forth to conquer. Navarre, Condé and Damville, as we know, were their chiefs, and Damville was the best leader of the three. Once before, he had submitted to Catherine, but his submission had not lasted. It was part of her task to bend his will without his knowing it, and one of her triumphs that she succeeded. Beside these, there were two other men who played prominent parts ; the one, Biron, the other, Turenne. Biron, Vice-Regent of Guienne for Navarre, called himself a chief of the Protestants ; but this was for party purposes and he was a Catholic at heart : a fierce, uncompromising soldier, who later showed his true colours. Navarre disliked, Catherine distrusted him. She saw, however, that unless she could put an end to the constant quarrels between him and his sovereign, Navarre, no solid peace could be established, and she effectually devoted all her craft to promote an understanding between them. The subtlest of the Huguenot tacticians was Turenne, the nephew of Montmorency, Navarre's trusted counsellor and the emissary finally despatched by him to settle the terms of peace with Catherine ; a military diplomat of the true Renaissance type, brave of heart, lax of morals, and independent of the Court as Navarre, from his position, could not be. Even when he became, as soon he did, the lover of Marguerite, it remained hard work to outwit him, and his enmity to Catherine did not change.

Yet the greatest danger to the Crown lay with none of these persons, but with one who had no direct concern with Catherine's journey—the greatest of the Catholic party, Henri de Guise. In Paris, and in the country, with an industry and

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skill like her own, with a force and a fire which she lacked and a secrecy which in itself was strength, he worked at forming a League, ostensibly to uphold the Roman faith, in reality to consolidate his power. And as a master-stroke of policy, this aristocrat of the aristocrats made himself the champion of popular rights—the idolized apostle of the people. There could not be a cleverer way of creating a formidable Opposition; but of these crafty proceedings the King and his mother as yet practically knew nothing.

It had taken no little diplomacy to persuade Navarre to receive his mother-in-law and his wife. He suspected them of hidden designs and refused their first proposal that he should join them at Bordeaux. Perhaps, too, his unwillingness may have sprung from a dread of once more falling under Margot's spell. He must have felt the power of her fascination, for in spite of his stiffness before she came, he could not hide his eagerness to see her. She was not well on the journey to Toulouse, and was left behind at a short distance. When his mother-in-law arrived in that city, his duty compelled him to go and meet her, but he hardly allowed the time to welcome her. Directly he had seen her, he mounted his horse and galloped off to find his Queen. She and Catherine handled him skilfully, but they could not quite banish his caution. Towards the Queen-Mother he was both respectful and full of distrust. He was indeed in a position that necessitated prudence. The Catholics were his avowed enemies; the Huguenots had no confidence in him. When he tried to widen their policy, they misunderstood him and thought him a traitor, and he was out of sympathy with their self-preserving fears and constant dread of a new massacre. He never succeeded in imposing his own ideas upon them; on the contrary, he found himself making unwilling concessions to the scoundrel crew, the knaves and brigands, who, as usual, had taken refuge under the cloak of Protestantism.

And if he was not a real Protestant leader, still less was he a ruler of his realm. He had no money with which to hold a Court, or to conduct a war. On every side danger threatened him—it was natural that he should look out for pitfalls. And Catherine, on her side, was watching him with unrelenting vigilance. She often thought he was undermining her. "My son, the King of Navarre," she writes, "has cheated us with a subtlety of which I shall speak not a little to him the first time that I see him." Yet they seem to have had amicable

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intercourse. "Navarre came to find me as I walked along the Garonne," she says ; and no doubt, as they strolled by the river, many obstacles to peace were cleared away. She tried coaxing and severity in turn, not only with Navarre, but with his colleagues. "After this, he retired," she says of one of these, "but not until I had *washed his head* well for him and made him feel how much he in particular lay under obligations to me . . . also that my resolution held firm, to wit, that I would never leave this country till I had in some way or another established peace."

Navarre knew the wisdom of delays and contrived to keep his royal guests at Toulouse. Their conversations were not in vain, and after many of them both there and at Réolles, it was decided that Navarre should summon an assembly at Nérac, to be composed of Catholics and Protestants, and that it should be left to these to settle the strife that wrecked the kingdom. The resolve once taken, a triumphant progress began—a course of diplomatic festivities at which business lurked hidden beneath roses. Nor were the feastings undisturbed by alarms. The whole of the countryside was harried by outbreaks of fighting and by general insecurity. One night, at Auch, Navarre was dancing at a ball when word was brought that the Catholics had surprised Réolles. The message was heard by him alone, and no sooner had he received it than he invented a plan. He could not save Réolles—he would retaliate. Without a word to any one he stole away, fetched his horse, and was gone. The result was the sudden surprise and taking of Fleurance, a town not far off, which the enemy had occupied. And having accomplished his purpose, he returned to Auch as quietly as he had left it. Presently the Court moved to Port-Sainte-Marie, a place on the Garonne, in the neighbourhood of the more important Nérac, and through that city, the capital of Navarre's dominions, they passed upon their way.

"My Gossip," Catherine wrote thence to Madame d'Uzès, "I am at Nérac, where I have been very pleasantly welcomed by the Master of the house. Yesterday I saw the first deputies, who all looked like Huguenot ministers, or like the birds you wot of. On this paper I should never dare give them their right name ; but you have understood me, and I you—for more than forty years of kindly memories. I trust that all will go well. . . I shall let you know about everything. . . I entreat you to make use of my litter and all that I possess,

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for that will always give me pleasure. Give me news of the King and Queen, the instant you see them. I envy you very much for having this joy sooner than I have." And again, rather later—"I have never been so long without this happiness," she says, "ever since he was born. When he was in Poland, it was only for eight months, and now already seven and a half have gone by, and it will be full two months more before this boon is granted me."

Her longing for her son pervades all her correspondence. At Port-Sainte-Marie she had the comfort that she was serving him. Here she could keep a tight hand on the preparations for the Council. She and her daughter and their following were lodged at the Convent of *le Paravis—le Paradis* the townspeople called it. The Queen-Mother devoted herself to the furtherance of every pacific measure. She looked upon herself as heaven-appointed—an accredited royal Ambassador from the only Sovereign greater than herself. "How beautiful are the feet of them that bring peace," she said, and she proceeded to ply the Huguenots with courtesies. She set herself laboriously to imitate their Puritanical speech, and her ladies practised it at her *Coucher*, amidst bursts of laughter. They named it "*le langage de Canaan*," and a Court Siren, Mademoiselle d'Atri, was instructor to the rest. Catherine had other terms for it—"phrases consistoriales," or *le conseil de Gamahiel*—but she kept her jests for her intimates. To the Calvinists she brought out her new-learned sentences. "God be judge betwixt me and ye," she exclaimed, "I affirm the Eternal before Him and His Angels."

Her verbal dallies with the Protestants did not change her feelings. They had given her too much trouble in the past to be forgotten, and the intellectual taste for their creed which, in early days, she had shown, had long since been effaced by her dislike of Puritanism. And now they saw through her politic dissimulation. St. Bartholomew's Eve was only one among the good reasons that they had for disbelieving her promises.

"That Sunday," she wrote in March to the King, "they made their Communion, so that it was impossible for us to hold our meeting until after supper. They brought the list of all the changes that they wished to make in the articles. Whereupon we embarked upon greater and more bitter quarrels than we had yet done; and we sat on till past midnight before we could agree about the words which they wanted to alter."

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Her powers of endurance were the terror of her followers. She attended Mass so early that when she sent for Pibrac and the Cardinal de Bourbon to attend her, they were still in bed and had to be thrice summoned before they came. From Mass she would go straight to her Council, often keeping various deputies "*une grosse heure*" waiting in the Ante-Chamber, and, when she came out again, still compelling their presence for several hours, although they had not yet tasted food. But by that means, at one sitting, she pushed through five articles out of twelve that were to serve in the future Treaty. The second session of the day lasted from one o'clock to five, which two of her councillors, a great lord and a Bishop, found so tiring that they had to leave the assembly and "go straightway to bed."

Margot in the meantime employed herself more gaily, although always with an eye to business. What went on in private between her and Navarre has not been told. The only public sign that she gave of deference to his views was her absence from week-day Mass. While Catherine was in] church, she made a point of tilting at the ring, and that, we may be sure, at this critical moment, was done with her mother's connivance.

Here for six weeks they both saw Navarre and Turenne every day, and Turenne and Marguerite, as we know, did not devote themselves exclusively to politics. It is difficult to judge whether Navarre was conscious of their relations. However this may have been, he assumed an open approval of her, for in March, 1579, he consented to take her back to live with him.

"I should dearly like to be with you," writes her mother to the Duchesse d'Uzès, "and I hope to do so soon, for I have finished my work and, in my humble opinion, have compelled a great many folk to lie, for I have achieved what was not thought possible. God be praised for it, for without Him we should never have reached the goal. . . . My daughter has remained with her husband, resolved to stir no more from his side."

Catherine had not been able to establish her dangerous daughter safely until peace was well within sight. "I am going off to Toulouse to finish the rest of the agreement," she wrote at the beginning of the month to the old Duchess, who had been paying her a visit, "and I assure you that the weather is no more pleasant than when you left us. The birds have ceased to fly about, for the spring has made a stride and the beans are already in flower, and so are the almonds

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and the big cherries. If it were not for the rain, I should think that it was summer-time. The King of Navarre . . . and his wife are both of them here. We have been experiencing great squalls from the quarrel of the Vicomte de Turenne with Duras . . . but, God be thanked, nothing has been broken. . . . I assure you that I shall have done a fine piece of work, if I accomplish what I have to accomplish here. In the meanwhile, send me news of the King and Queen ; for you know that all my pleasure lies there—the same ten years ago as it is now."

Madame d'Uzès' stay with Catherine was probably for motives of business. The Queen-Mother made her her agent at the Court—a kind of unofficial spy on the King's actions, and the Duchess acquired great power over him. She was a remarkable woman, forcible, attractive and discreet, the closest friend both of Catherine and Marguerite, who always called her "her Sibyl." Most of their best letters were addressed to her and they regarded her with a trustful veneration that they hardly accorded to others. "I am entirely yours," wrote Marguerite, "and you are my true Sibyl, my counsellor, my comrade, and my nurse, in short the one person in the world who will always know more than any other about my innermost self. . . . A wretched scribbled paper . . . has not the power to express the affection that I have vowed to give you, or the confidence with which you inspire me. . . . But I do entreat you to love me, for I treasure your friendship more than anything." And "*Baisant ces belles mains qui font honte aux plus jeunes*," is the ending to another of her letters. The feelings of the mother and daughter for their clever confidante would not be worth dwelling on, did it not make a fresh and pleasing episode amid all the sordid dust that surrounded them, and had it not been of solid service. For the Duchess, understanding both, acted as their intermediary. No doubt she counted for much in the restoration of Marguerite to her husband. After her visit was over, that Princess wrote to her—

"You say that you don't like the use of rhetoric. In spite of that, your regrets brought the tears to my eyes. Do believe me, my Sibyl (and this is perfectly sincere), that I have never felt a loss more than I feel that of your presence. There does not pass an hour in the day when I have not a vast amount to tell you : as many things, in truth, as displease me—and that means every single thing I see. Nor can I hope

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in my mourning for you, to be consoled by Madame de Perquigny, for since you went she has become so dreamy that it is evident she gives me nothing but her time. . . . I have spoken to the Queen ; she is still extremely pleased with me, and delighted with the honour she has done me in assuring me of her good graces. You are the cause of all my good fortune ; and my heart is so full of gratitude that Madame de B. herself cannot be more yours than I am—I, who kiss your hands a hundred thousand times.—M."

Catherine's luck seemed to have turned. While Marguerite was being re-instated and the treaty with Navarre neared conclusion, the disaffected Southern provinces were also within sight of peace. And this, after storms and difficulties which had almost reduced her to despair.

" I have been so tormented by the brawls of Provence that I have only enough brains left to get angry "—thus she wrote on May 1. " And God Who always helps me hath so greatly favoured me that I have accomplished my purpose there, and also in Guienne. There has been no lack of birds of prey though . . . but in all other ways they are honest folk enough—and very good dancers of *le volte*. I do not know if I shall find them better in the Dauphiné. If the proverb hold true that ' the worst man hangs on to the end of the tail,' I am much afraid that they will prove as bad as the others. But I put my whole trust in God."

Although her head-quarters were at Port-Sainte-Marie, she had constantly been journeying to and fro, one day here, another there, settling the country in the South, as occasion required. It was early in May that the arrangements with the dilatory Navarre were settled. She describes her meeting with him to the King.

" Monsieur mon fils " (says her letter)—

" I will tell you the best tidings we could wish for, for the which I thank God with all my heart ; to wit that in the morning the King of Navarre came to find me . . . and he spoke to me with an open heart and real sincerity, or else I am the woman in the world the most deceived. For I had never yet seen him like this, or anywhere near it. When he arrived he began by telling me that he would have known no ease had I departed without his seeing me again, and, in sooth, he had travelled all through the night and had come six good Gascon leagues, which are equal to ten or twelve of the French ones. . . . But he did confess to me that he felt worn out by his

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long night journey, and he went to get some breakfast while I finished dressing and heard Mass. When I came out thence, he returned to find me, and to escort me on foot from the church to the outskirts of the town, where he took his leave of me in the humblest and most courteous fashion I could have wished. And in my opinion he did so, meaning all that he said, assuring me that, without a doubt, he would establish the Peace. Of his own free will, too, he gave me what he had before refused—a hundred times, I should say—since I came here: and that is the little tuft of hair that grew round his left ear, the which I accepted with a good will. And I take it as a symbol from those of the Religion that calls itself Reformed—the Religion that will no longer exist now that God has granted us peace. . . . After this I took a ride outside the town, and so did he, and we came to the gates of the Abbey of Prouille, the place where my cousin, the Cardinal de Bourbon, has been sleeping; and there I dismounted and got into my coach. Once more he took his leave of me, in the presence of all the crowd of people who were there, keeping up his great demonstrations; then, getting again on his horse, he accompanied me for nearly three leagues. . . . And while he was with me we passed through a little town, entirely Catholic, called Montréal, where I commanded the Consuls who came to meet us to offer him the keys, the which they did. And he took that in very good part."

Home seemed to her now within hail, and her spirits rose.

"My Gossip," she wrote to Madame d'Uzès, "you will see me in a month safe and sound, if God will, although I have still to run the risk of the plague and the dangers from the Cevennes brigands, birds of prey as they are. . . . I pray God to preserve you to the age of a hundred and eighty, so that we may then sup together at the Tuileries *sans chapeau ni honnêtes*."

But her course was not as smooth as she thought. Every sort of difficulty was put in her path—most of them the pettiest of obstacles. At one moment it was the Protestants of Montpellier who claimed the nave and watch-tower of the church ("the only church," she says, "that has been left standing") while the Catholics demanded the whole building. The Protestants were "teasing, carping and opinionated." There were high words and stormy discussions. At last, one afternoon, both sides sought her, and she summed up for the Catholics. There were further quarrels, which ended in a Council

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of compromise, sworn over by the Queen-Mother to settle affairs "*a l'aimable*." At another time all progress seemed destroyed by the Mercenaries' clamour for their wages, or by the legal quibble of dilatory judges; oftener still, the cabals of unknown enemies, or the rivalries of so-called allies blocked the way. But the first days of summer saw the term of the troubles in Provence and Guienne, as well as of her difference with Navarre. To the end, she went hither and thither, smoothing away the last difficulties in these Southern regions.

"I walked all the length of the city walls," she wrote to the King, "and reached the Gate of Montpellier which I found well-lined with arquebusiers, as I had heard. But that did not hinder me from going on fearlessly, without showing alarm or mistrust, although they were all so near my coach (the more so that the road there is narrow) that the butts of their arquebuses nearly touched my carriage. The Consuls with their red robes and their caps, accompanied by a great crowd of people of either faith who followed them, came to meet me in all humility, offering you and me their goods and lives, with all the devotion owed by loyal subjects; and both sides promised me upon their honour to live according to my commands. When I got almost opposite the Gate, another great crowd of people came forth from the town, all showing rather more goodwill than I had been informed they had. The fact that I had gone about so freely among them helped a good deal, so I hear, to increase their confidence, and their certainty, too, that peace was near. . . . I thought I might have managed to sleep here by yesterday—so as to escape the risk of the plague in one day's journey, and get the earlier to Provence; but I felt a little tired, as I did six good leagues among the rocks of this countryside before my dinner."

Catherine's policy was a large one. The delegates chosen by her to carry out her work of pacification were Catholic or Protestant indifferently; and the Council which at length met at Nérac, though it modified the Protestants' demands, ended in a final agreement which was the precursor of the Edict of Nantes. The two religions were practically put upon an equal footing, and nineteen towns were made over to the Huguenots.

Her task was nearly accomplished. The Dauphiné alone remained unsettled, and to that province she now had to go. This time it was without her daughter, whom she left behind with her husband. To do so was the consummation of Catherine's

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desires. Her daughter had long been her bane, but she always kept her pride in Margot's brilliance, and, with the inconsequence that sometimes overcame her, she was broken-hearted at their parting. When it was over, she shut herself up in her room and spent the rest of the day in tears.

The difficulties which confronted her in the Dauphiné taxed her skill to the utmost. She also had anxieties at home, and these upset her wonted calm. In her letters she tells her story with all its ups and downs. Those that follow are again to the Duchesse d'Uzès.

"My Gossip," runs the first, "I am in your country of Dauphiné, the hilliest and most exasperating in which I have hitherto set foot. Every day there is cold, heat, rain, fine weather, hail; and the minds of the people here are just the same. But God, who leads me, is bringing me to my goal . . . and in ten days I shall be in my sweet France and in the town where I shall see the dearest thing I have in the world. Rumour says that you govern him; keep me in his good graces; and tell d'Écars that since she has sat next him at table I am sure he no more wishes to die. . . . You will not have more from me this time, for I have been writing to every one else so that I may be in every one's favour."

The next was written in September, more than a month later, after news of the illness of the King.

"I have been sorely troubled, and not without cause, for he is my life, and without him I neither desire to live nor to be. And I think that God has had compassion upon me who have had so much sorrow from the loss of my husband and my children and that He did not wish to crush me by taking *him*. When I think how ill he has been, I do not know what or where I am. . . . Believe me it is an acute grief to be away from one whom one loves as I love him, and to know that he is ill. It is like dying by slow burning. . . . And if, although not in such danger, he had still continued to be ill, I should have left everything and gone off to see him, taking my usual long days' journeys. . . . For I could have no longer borne to hear folk say 'He is ill,' and not to see him."

It is curious to compare this outburst with Marguerite's letter at the same time, to the same lady.

"If this company," she writes, "were as fertile in news as the Court, I should, my Sibyl, have some means of proving to you that I never wish to hide anything, or to pose in any part before you. But living as I do without novelty, always

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planning the same plans, and doing the same deeds, I cannot . . . make any truer confession to you than this. I have been much troubled by the illness of the King. I am sending this messenger that I may rejoice at the news of his recovery. I hear that my brother has gone to Alençon. If, of your goodness, you will let me have the truth about everything, I shall be greatly beholden to you, and, in return, I will serve you with such good heart that I dare implore you to love me. And I assure you of the power you have over me."

Just when Catherine's desire to return, accentuated by the King's indisposition, seemed to be near fulfilment, she was faced by a fresh and a serious complication—the unexpected conspiracy of the Maréchal de Bellegarde, a plot unimportant in itself since it had no permanent issue, but acquiring a significance of its own from Catherine's method of handling it. Bellegarde was an ambitious intriguer, the Governor of the Marquisate of Saluces, a French possession on the Italian side of Piedmont. It was chiefly valuable because it opened up the way into Italy, and was therefore dangerous in the hands of an enemy. Bellegarde, who secretly designed to form a principality for himself, made a sudden raid upon the town of Saluces, the capital of the dominion, and treacherously took it for his purposes. He did not effect this without aid. Nominally supported by the Protestants, he was privately receiving help from Spain. At the outset of his enterprise, the Duke of Savoy, with an eye to future profits, also abetted him, but, checked by prudence, later desisted. When Bellegarde's crime was discovered, the Duke, however, did not desert him and, anxious no doubt for his own safety, he acted as emissary to Catherine, whose anger at the plot knew no bounds.

The Maréchal had a clever tongue and did his best to explain away his conduct, but Catherine was not to be put off and she summoned him to meet her in the Dauphiné. On the two months of prevarication and delay it is not needful to dwell. Catherine had her way, and at last, in October, he obeyed her summons. She herself has recorded what occurred.

"Yesterday, after dinner," she writes to the King, "the Duke of Savoy arrived with the Maréchal de Bellegarde, who came to meet him near this place. The Duke presented him to me in the great hall of this house where I was awaiting them. At his first approach, the Maréchal turned deathly pale and seemed like one amazed. He knelt down upon both

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his knees and did me reverence ; after the which he made as if he would withdraw, but I called him and the Duke to my side and told him that I was very glad of his arrival, and when the Duke had retired with my cousin the Cardinal de Bourbon, the Maréchal made me great professions of his zeal and of his true affection toward your service—a debt which he owed you for your many favours. To the which I replied that I was glad of it. Near the end of all this talk, the Duke again advanced and heard what I was saying ; then both went away to unboot themselves and to have supper. Directly they had done, this same Duke returned to find me in my bed-chamber, and with him he brought the Maréchal, who stood by the side of my bed, where I also was standing. And then I showed him your portrait, which was hung against the tapestry, and said, 'There is the King, your master, to whom I gave you and who, since that, hath so much loved and honoured you.' Whereupon, gazing on you and with tears in his eyes, he said that the picture was well done and that it was as if he saw you. I answered that you still were as you had been toward him and that you would always remain so, as long as he, too, was what he should be. After this, we really entered upon business ; and as the Duke had begun to talk with my grandchild and my cousin, the Princesse de Condé, and the other ladies who were in my room, I sat down and made the Maréchal sit also. And, once again repeating his speeches of affection, he proceeded to explain the occasions which had forced him to behave as he has done and how he was pushed into his actions, for all the which he showed exceeding sorrow, saying that he would give half the blood in his veins that the whole thing had not happened."

If Bellegarde had imagined that protestations would satisfy Catherine, he was mistaken. "I brought him to the point," she went on, "and asked him what he meant to do about the Marquisate" (of Saluces). Bellegarde did his best to evade her—talked of the religious difficulties that blocked the way to decision, and showed her very clearly, as she says, that "he did not want us to begin with his own part in the matter." "*Toutes fois revenant toujours là*" (terse words which lose all their force in English) "I very quickly made him grasp I had come here to know that and nothing more." The wary mouse still held back, but the cat's persistence won the day. Bellegarde ended by entire submission, and two days later he knelt to ratify his vow in the presence of the assembled Council.

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For all that, his perjured mind remained unchanged and he held to his designs upon Saluces, although this time his plots for power were for his son. Catherine kept a careful watch upon him—an easy task with her army of spies. "I use . . . every man," she said, "as he can serve me, never trusting him beyond a certain point, for I have not forgotten the past." It was thus that she kept most political threads in her hand and so often took unexpected action. In December, the Maréchal died suddenly, and many people said that he was poisoned. But this charge was the natural one to make, and there is nothing but rumour to support it.

The Queen-Mother's task was done. Navarre was reconciled to the Crown, and Damville—Maréchal de Montmorency since the death of his elder brother—had skilfully been lured back to her side. Peace was established in Languedoc, Guienne, Provence, the Dauphiné; France for the moment seemed whole again.

Catherine prepared to turn homewards. There were still details to be seen to and final arrangements which she would trust to no hand but her own. It is characteristic of her vitality that, amidst all this work, she found time to choose and despatch a dwarf with much the same minute attention that she gave to the most crucial State affairs. He was a present to the Prince of Piedmont. "I send you a dwarf," she wrote to him, "having heard that you wanted a well-made one. His figure is of better proportions than his brain, and this will make you pardon his silliness. You will like him, though, for the love of me. I commend him to you. As a beginning of his service, he will present you with this note, and he will remind you of her who, all her life, will remain,

"Your good mother,

"CATHERINE."

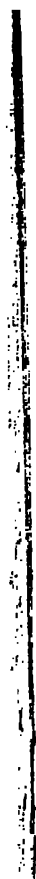
Her tasks completed, she started to join the Court, and November once more saw her reunited to the King. Her rejoicings were, however, short-lived. Hardly was she back with the South in peace behind her, when the North began to give her trouble. Condé, the Governor of Picardy, was causing agitation in his province, and Catherine knew that if it continued the country would soon take fire again. In December, she again set out on heroic travels, and went to seek him at the town of La Fère. She implored him to go—to leave Picardy—but he refused to stir. The district was kept in a simmering state of disaffection

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and Condé only moved five months later. Nor was his departure an advantage. He had gone to seek fresh help from the German Princes, and although his efforts came to nothing, the aims Catherine made for were frustrated. "To make herself necessary to France," says an envoy, "she had needed civil disturbances, and she did her best to foment them. . . . But having no further motive for exasperating factions, she now tries to appease them, so that men may recognize her skill and wisdom." Her momentary triumph did not endure and the stern law of history was in due time fulfilled. What a man giveth that shall he receive. In earlier years Catherine had given discord, and discord was the reward that life had brought her.

CHAPTER XVIII

The King of Navarre and the Reine Margot



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THE Paris Catherine found on her return was no better than the Paris she had left. The acute distress which reigned outside was still disregarded within its walls. The famous Ordinances of May, passed in the previous year at the Assembly of Poitiers, enacting every kind of reform, lay and clerical, were powerless against existing evils, which had grown too strong for any law. Out of eight hundred abbeys in the gift of the King, not one hundred were filled by regular Abbés, and a like corruption reigned in every department. Under such circumstances, it was not surprising that the unreal Peace was soon broken. Henri III was determined to exasperate the Protestant party; while Marguerite, whose interests were now identified with those of her husband, was as much bent upon maintaining the truce. For once, she and Alençon, who was constantly with her, were (whatever their motives) leagued together for a good purpose. But their brother had more influence than they, and his desire for war prevailed.

A means to irritate Navarre lay close to his hand. He did not scruple to write and reveal Marguerite's relations with Turenne to her husband. Navarre, who was well aware of them, showed the letter both to Margot and Turenne, and pretended that he believed in his wife's innocence. All the ladies of his Court gathered round her, and Alençon, for motives of his own, also figured as her champion. That firebrand had returned to his favourite field for intrigue. His mind was once more fixed upon the Netherlands, and he wanted to prove so disturbing to the King, that he (Henri) would be forced to bribe him into compliance by a promise to support him in Flanders. Navarre watched events and soon saw that, since the King desired war, it was inevitable. The insult to his wife was a sufficient pretext for *La Guerre des Amoureux*—as the ensuing campaign was derisively called.

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He gave each of his Protestant chieftains the half of a gold Crown-piece, and told them that when they received the other half, fighting was to begin.

In the actions that followed Navarre had the victory, winning many laurels at the siege laid by him to Cahors, which lasted four days and four nights. His triumph might have been more fruitful had the Protestant party been united, but Condé was acting on his own account in the North and nullified much of Navarre's work. The war lingered on for a twelvemonth, and perhaps would not have ended then had not Alençon offered to act as mediator. The King, by now tired of defeat, actually accepted his brother's offer, and the Prince started for Guienne, followed by Catherine and her Squadron. In November, 1580, the *Paix de Fleix* was signed in Périgord, and proved to be little more than a repetition of the *Paix de Bergerac*.

Alençon's intervention had not been disinterested. He hoped by this means to gain further promises of help from the King for his new schemes in the Netherlands. The Peace left every adventurer in France free to follow him, and his projects now centered upon the relief of Cambrai. The Duke of Parma's success in the Low Countries had culminated in his conciliation of the Catholic *Noblesse*, who had now all rallied to his side and broken with the Protestant party. Each faction formed a federation of its own: the Catholics, the Union of Arras, the Protestants, the Union of Utrecht; and the Protestant group sent to Alençon to beg him to be their Prince, under Orange as "Sovereign Chieftain." They furthermore published a manifesto, written by one Marnix: a declaration of their ideas which marked a long step upon the road of liberty. Submission to a tyrant, it said, was a different matter from loyalty to a just King. There was no sin in forswearing obedience to Spain. The freedom of this statement produced such a startling effect, that a Conservative gentleman of Friesland, to whom it was sent for his signature, was said to have died of the shock of reading it. But it served the ends of Alençon, and united the side which summoned him.

Catherine was seriously perturbed. She foresaw that Alençon's power among the Flemings would mean fresh cabals on his part, and that she must once more set out upon a preventive mission. She journeyed to meet him in Touraine. Thence she wrote what had happened to the King.

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"You will know," she said, "better than I do how to speak to him, and it seems mere folly for me to write to you. But I only do so to make you see the humour in which I find him. He thinks that you make no account of him and, more than this, that you distrust him.

". . . I heard him very patiently, and for as long as he wanted. Then I took up each of the points he had set forth, and answered them one by one, definitely and clearly."

Catherine's philosophical cheerfulness carried her through all complications. The only thing she found insupportable was, as usual, separation from the King. It was during this absence from him that she wrote to her "Gossip," Madame d'Uzès: "As you have seen my King and son, who is also *your* darling, I shall not ask you how you are; for even were you dead, I am certain you would rise again to be with *him*—seeing, also, the good cheer that, as you tell me, he has shown you. And you may believe me when I say that although he loves those whom I love, he loves *you* for your own sake alone. Prithee, send me news of him without ceasing. It is the greatest pleasure you can give me. And do not be so long without writing to me as you have been this time. It makes me fear that your affairs are not going as you would wish. Do not vex yourself about anything that happens; for people who have turned forty must cease to torment themselves about the goods of this world, and they *must* keep gay while they are in it. Come to me as soon as you can, so that the company I keep—which the King's arrival will improve—may divert you. . . . The bearer of this will tell you how jovially we have passed our Lent here. We have had so many balls and masques that I am sure you have not had more at Paris.

"And this is written at Chenonceaux, whence I pray God that He will give you fifty years more life, in perfect health."

When the Queen-Mother reached home, she did not feel that she had gained much ground with Alençon, but she did not leave off trying to persuade him.

"My son," she wrote at the end of the year, . . . "I entreat you to consider that I am your mother, and to remember that you have never got aught but good from the counsels I have given you; while, when you have disobeyed them, you have only reaped shame and injury. . . . Never has mother desired more fervently than I do the union and welfare of her children—

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more fervently than I desire life itself. And nobody was happier than I at the King's approval of your praiseworthy conduct in the negotiations for peace. But now that I have heard . . . that you commissioned Fervaques to collect all the forces possible that you might go and succour Cambrai . . . I confess that my joy is turned to bewilderment . . . and I do not doubt that this project will not only deprive you of the glory you have earned . . . but it will complete the ruin of your House, gain you the hatred of the people, entirely destroy the State, and, in conclusion, it will make me the most miserable mother that ever was born. For by your tricks it seems as though . . . you were only trying to embroil the Catholic King before we have signed a Peace with him . . . so that this realm may fall into irreparable confusion. Do you want it to be said that you, my son, are the cause of this misfortune? . . . And what can you do for these Low Countries which have summoned you? When our State is ruined and the King is without the means to help you, you will only bring the Netherlands expense, and you will be in danger of getting sent home again with more shame and vituperation than you now have honour from their invitation. . . . You struck this bargain without us to my great regret. . . . And if you contemptuously abandon the certain for the uncertain, you will find yourself shabbily portioned; when the one fails you, the other will rush upon you. . . . Pray remember what fruits you brought back from your first enterprise in that country."

"I had promised myself a happy old age after all the evils and the crosses I have suffered," she adds eleven days later—"and after my toiling and moiling I had hoped to bring about the felicity of this House; the union, I mean, of those whom God left to me. . . . But I see that you are ill advised by those who are envious at seeing you in favour with the King."

Her wrath with Alençon increased as she found how obstinate he was. "Let him not resemble the Spaniards," she said, "who often propose things and artfully prolong negotiations to gain time and turn them into smoke. As for me, I am now sixty, and I do not wish to be deceived by these dalliyings."

Bellièvre, her Intendant of Finance, had the same opinion of him. "It is not his custom," he writes to her, "however men talk to him of danger, to depart easily from any opinion that once he gets into his head. He is here with the King

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of Navarre, who hourly offers him his person, his friends, every means in his power to help him in this war." And again, later : " I never heard him speak with so much passion, and that day I was with him for more than three hours, without ceasing to talk of this business. But he held to his opinion, in the which he remained so deeply rooted that it was quite impossible for me to make any way."

Alençon had played his game well. He had collected a large army which Parma was not strong enough to cope with, and in August, 1581, the Prince entered Cambrai. Here his successes ended. His money was spent—his supplies exhausted—and this in spite of the fact that the King and Catherine had secretly sent him succour. For as soon as they saw that he was beyond their control, they tried to make the best of a bad job and to reap some advantage from his exploits by becoming anonymous partners in the concern. But when the watchful Philip grew suspicious, Henri did not scruple to throw over his brother, whom he left to do the best he could in Flanders. Alençon had fresh schemes of his own. Two years before, in 1579, he had already paid a visit of courtship to England, and now he determined to go there again and renew the negotiations for his marriage. He discharged the greater part of his troops, and set off to plead his cause with Elizabeth.

She received him most demonstratively—she put her ring upon his finger—she called him her " little frog "—she brought beef-tea every morning to his bedside. The story of his farcical wooing, of her coy vacillations and coquetries, is too well known to need repeating here. There were discussions of the religious difficulty, followed by arrangement and compromise. But in the end she played her usual game. After keeping him near her for two months and behaving as his affianced bride, she began to draw back from the match. On the English side, the Protestants opposed it ; on the French side, the Catholic Guisards. She sighed and said sadly, that her heart must be sacrificed to her reason. Alençon, who knew her, must have grasped what this meant. Soon after, she gave him a loan of money and ordered Leicester to escort him to Antwerp. " I could not better have shown you my goodwill," wrote Catherine rather later to her, " than by offering you all that remains to me of my lord, the King, who loved and valued you. And I prove that I do so too by offering you one after the other." "*Madame, ma bonne*

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soeur," wrote Elizabeth to Catherine, "*chi fa quel quo può non è tenuto a fare più* ; otherwise I should have too much to complain of from a Princess whom I have so dearly loved." So ended the play between them.

Alençon had no time for regret ; he was again absorbed in Flemish affairs. In February, 1582, the Netherlands had proclaimed him Duke of Brabant. The prospect that he found there was not a hopeful one, for the Duke of Parma had utilized his absence, and had regained his own power in the country. Had it not been for the Prince of Orange, Alençon's position would have been untenable. The incongruity between his glorious titles and the weakness of his position, between his insolent French followers and the grave Flemish reformers, added to the difficulties already there, not the least of which was lack of funds. But of these obstacles he made no parade, and outwardly his affairs seemed to flourish. Orange escorted him to Ghent and to Bruges, where the French Prince had triumphant entries. Biron and Montpensier accompanied him as soldiers and counsellors : they were also the King's spies upon his actions. He succeeded in taking several towns, and then spoiled all by that disastrous assault which is known as "the Folly of Antwerp." His extravagant attack upon that city, in 1583, resulted in its rising against him and taking awful vengeance upon his men. He himself was forced to flee, but the citizens did their best to prevent his escape. They opened the dams upon him, and he and his troops were nearly drowned. They had more than one reason to hate him, for, just before these scenes were enacted, his follower, Salcède, had revealed a plot of his with Spain : France was to be given to Philip and Alençon was to be made its King. After such doings, the only wish of the Netherlands was to get rid of him, and the fear of some fresh Spanish conspiracy induced them to come to speedy terms. They accepted the King's mediation, ratified their former treaty with the Duke, and renewed his empty title of Prince of Brabant. He, upon his side, evacuated all towns excepting Dunkirk, which the Duke of Parma finally re-captured ; and thus ingloriously did the "Prince of Brabant" leave his principedom—at last to return no more.

Catherine was thankful to see him finally free of Flanders. At this juncture she had no leisure for his concerns there. On the one hand, she was negotiating with England, on the other, she was profoundly absorbed in hatching a new scheme

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in Portugal. The expedition of 1581 which resulted from these plottings was a noteworthy instance of her love of dominion and her want of statesmanship. The death of Henri, the Cardinal-King of Portugal, left his throne to be disputed by two claimants, both of them his nephews—Philip, who seized it, and a certain Don Antonio. Catherine, who at first made a show of supporting the rights of Antonio, presently brought forth a third and most surprising claim—her own. To do this she had hunted up genealogies—had proclaimed the last King's family illegitimate—and, as far back as the thirteenth century, had discovered a remote ancestor of hers, one King Alphonso III of Portugal, from whom she derived her pretensions. Upon this basis she acted. Philip was about to attack the Azores—a most important possession, since it dominated the trade to the far East and all ships that went from Lisbon touched there—when Catherine sent a monster fleet (for which once more she bled the country), under the command of Philip Strozzi, to defend the islands. The move was an extravagantly rash one; the French were severely defeated, in July, at Terceira, and returned home in a crest-fallen state. Like so many vacillators, Catherine often acted on the stimulus of impulse, and in this case the impulse was disastrous. Philip retained the Portuguese throne and scored a signal victory over France.

It was early in this same year (1581) that Catherine wrote one of the few letters which gives us a glimpse of herself. It is written to the King, who, for once, seems to have expressed some gratitude for her labours.

"You do me the honour," she says, "to write that I have preserved the realm, and kept it from being cut up. God in His grace has allowed me to see the whole kingdom obeying you. However great the hatred and malice that I have earned for this, I have found that such feelings never came from good folk, or loyal servants, but from those whom I prevented from carrying out their designs. And even *their* followers . . . have been forced to tell the truth and to acknowledge that I saved all for you and for the late King—as I ought. I know perfectly well that in doing this I did it for myself, and that the obligation I owed to the two Kings, your father and your grandfather, has now been in part fulfilled by the keeping what they themselves commanded to be kept, in all the freshness in which they left it. And

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if I have not saved the whole, at least I have saved a portion."

Catherine spoke thus in the lull of civil war, but domestic dissensions were not wanting. Disputes had again broken out between the King of Navarre and his wife. The lightness of his behaviour was such as to cause scandal even to the lightest. His father, King Antoine's love-affairs were respectable by comparison. His last love, a lady of the Court commonly called La Fosseuse, had gained absolute dominion over him. With an amazing laxity, he demanded domestic recognition of her from his wife. He compelled Marguerite to accompany her to Spa for the waters, and, not content with this, he roused her one night from her slumbers to receive the child of La Fosseuse into the world. Such doings were too much, even for Queen Margot. It was not her feelings that were hurt; she had never been sensitive upon that score. Indeed, in old days, she had been wounded when her husband left off making her the confidante of his intercourse with Madame de Sauve: "for whoever was his fancy," she says, "he had always talked to me as freely about her as if I had been his sister. . . . And I saw that what I dreaded most had happened and that I was deprived of his frank confidence." In such matters she was a frank cynic; a staunch ally, a good comrade, anything, in short, but a wife. Her social honour, however, did affect her, and this had now been seriously impugned. And even if she had not felt this for herself, the Queen-Mother was there to feel it for her. Navarre's conduct was the occasion of a memorable letter from his mother-in-law—one of two rare pieces of autobiography in which occur the only allusions she ever made to her own bitter experience, and the only noteworthy mentions of the name of Diane de Poitiers.

Both as human documents and also as epitomes of Catherine's strange outlook upon morals, they are worth quoting at some length. The first is addressed to the King of Navarre.

1582, June 12.

"My Son,—

"I was never so amazed as when I heard the language which Frontenac repeated to several people, declaring that such were the words that he had used, by your order, to your wife. I should not have believed him, had it not been that when I asked him, he assured me that it was true. And

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he confessed that he was in great anger and despair, nor could he tell what could have moved you to this, seeing that at your parting you told him you had bidden farewell to Fosseuse as to one whom you would not see again. . . . For she had been sent off to her mother . . . a thing which, in truth, reason demanded . . . from the moment that she was such a fool as to abandon herself to you. For you are by no means the first young husband who has not been very wise in such matters, but I certainly consider you the first and only one who has used such language to his wife. I myself had the honour to marry the King, my lord and your sovereign, whose daughter you have wedded. But the thing in the world which most vexed him was that I should hear of matters like these. And when Madame de Fleming's fault found her out, he much approved of her being sent away, and never gave me black looks because of it, or spoke the less courteously to me. With Madame de Valentinois, things were conducted as they had once been with Madame d'Estampes—in all honour. But when people were such fools as to make a public scandal of themselves, he would have been much annoyed if I had kept them about me. And if he was my King and yours, this lady is his daughter, the sister of your present sovereign ; and she serves you, if you will only reflect, more truly than you think, and loves and honours you and prides herself upon her marriage as much as if you were the son of the King of France, and she your subject. To insult her for the whim of a disreputable woman is hardly fitting treatment for a high-bred lady, descendant of so great a House. . . . Nor can I think that the message that you sent her really comes from you. You are too well born, being of the same House as herself, not to know how you ought to live with the daughter of your King . . . who loves you . . . as a noble lady should. Indeed, if I thought that she did not, I would neither support her, nor take the faintest trouble to make you recognize the wrong that you have done yourself. For she cannot, as you must see, prevent herself from being jealous of what she cares for more than herself. In that she does her duty, and you ought to love her for it. But you, too, must do what you ought, and you must love her and esteem her for what she is, and is to you . . .

“ Your good mother

“ CATHERINE.”

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The second letter, which was written rather later—in 1584—through its gist and subject-matter belongs here. This time she gives a lecture to Margot, who had shocked the public even of that day by the loose nature of the friends she had around her. Catherine did not write directly to her—she addressed herself to Bellièvre, who was then with the Queen of Navarre.

"Besides that our life either honours or dishonours us, so does the company we keep," she says. "And this holds chiefly true of Princesses who are young and think themselves beautiful. Perhaps she (Marguerite) will tell you that I see every kind of society and that when I was young I mixed with all sorts and conditions of men. To that there is an answer which cannot be contradicted. In my youth, I had a King of France as father-in-law who imposed upon me that which pleased him, and I was forced to obey. . . . After his death, his son, whom I had the honour to marry, took his place, and to him I owed a like obedience, and more. And thanks be to God, Who approved all that I did to please them, these persons never gained so much power over my will . . . that I ever did aught against my honour which would require me to pray for God's pardon, or make me fear that my memory would be less praised. But, she may also say that now that I am a widow and mistress of my own actions I should send away all these people and cease to go out in society. Yet my business was to hold fast all the subjects of their Majesties, my children, and not to offend such persons, but to lure them on to do service to the Crown. And she should understand that, being what I am, known to all the world, and having lived, as I have done, to my age, I can talk as I like and see whom I like. And if she behaves like me, at my age she will be able to do the same, without fear of offending God, or causing scandal to the world. But being the daughter of a King and married to a Prince who calls himself a King, . . . she does what she likes : the very reason that she ought to reject every person who is not worthy of consorting with a wise and good Princess—young, too, and perhaps imagining herself more beautiful than she really is. When you have left her, I do not know who will tell her all these things ; for, as to writing, now that she is back with her husband, I shall write nothing to her that he cannot see.

"I entreat you, too, to bid her cease what she has been doing, and not to lavish so many attentions on the ladies to whom

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he makes love. He will only think that she is glad that *he* loves others because she can therefore follow his lead. And pray do not let her urge my example as a precedent. If I showed courtesy to Madame de Valentinois, it was the King who made me do so ; and I always let him know that I sorely minded it. For there never yet was woman who loved her husband and also loved his mistress (there is no use in calling such an one by a different name, although the word is ugly to say). Do not let her any longer suffer him to make love in her house to her ladies, for I assure you, were I in her place, I would not endure it. If she will but obey him in reason . . . and show him the love she really bears him. . . . He can only be very much pleased at it, and love and respect her the more."

We get no indication how either husband or wife took Catherine's exhortations. Margot had opportunities enough to hear her mother's opinions. In the years 1582 and 1583, the Queen of Navarre was at the French Court, summoned thither by the King, who was more than ever anxious to separate her from her Huguenot husband. Wherever she went, there was disturbance. Her presence re-aroused Henri III's aversion, and as his relations with Navarre were already strained, he had no diplomatic reason to repress his feelings. He had been writing to his brother-in-law to complain that Marguerite's ladies were immoral—to bid him "chase them away like noxious vermin." And now he took more direct measures. At his command, she was forcibly unmasked by the Captain of the Guards at the Porte St. Jacques, one day, as, contrary to her custom, she was going masked, doubtless to some assignation. Her ladies were seized to make sure that none of them were men—her servants cross-examined about her doings. A worse disgrace followed. The King himself took occasion to insult her in the presence of the whole Court. He recounted a long list of her lovers—Pibrac, her Chancellor, was, according to him, among them ; he accused her of having an illegitimate child by one of these gentlemen, Jacques de Harlay, Seigneur de Champsvallon, "le beau Champsvallon," as he was called. Tradition says that the child, born this year, in the heart of Paris, was a boy, and that he grew up to be a monk, who went by the name of Frère Ange. Did the monk, we wonder, ever attempt to shrive his incongruous mother ? Henri ended by ordering his sister "to deliver the city of her presence" and get away to Gascony, which command she proceeded to obey. But before she had time to

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get off, she was arrested one morning in bed and found sixty archers around her, a wanton indignity put upon her for no reason, since there was no attempt to keep her a prisoner. Her final departure was sadly like flight—very early in the day, without either retinue or servants.

These scenes, degrading in themselves, had serious consequences. Her husband refused to take back a woman who had been so much dishonoured, and said that he would not change his course till the truth had been proved. If the charges made by her brother were deserved, she must duly suffer justice ; but if those who had accused her had lied, then vengeance must be taken upon them. "Reparation or condemnation," was the message he sent to the King. When d'Aubigné, his emissary, delivered it, Henri's anger so overcame him that he laid his hand upon the hilt of his sword, as if to draw it, but he had to swallow his indignation. He could not reasonably expect Navarre to welcome one whom he himself had spurned. "What," asked Mornay, "would Christendom say if he received her thus, so to speak, bespattered, and if he embraced and caressed what you have ignominiously banished from your Court?" Catherine tried to pacify Navarre's messenger. She was getting into her coach, when she saw him and summoned him to speak with her, assuring him that she would have the scoundrels who insulted Marguerite executed. In the end, Navarre took his Queen back. Neither of the conditions that he had made had been fulfilled, but the King made a vague statement that "calumny had power to blacken even the most virtuous of Princesses"—and the word "calumny" had to serve the injured husband as sufficient denial of her guilt.

How he treated her, what happened when they came together, can merely be conjectured. The only impressions that we have come from Marguerite herself, and she is hardly to be trusted. To read her version is to picture Arcadia—an Arcadia of the Renaissance, where husbands are allowed their indiscretions, and to "live and let live" is religion. "Our Court," she says, "is so goodly and so pleasant that we never could envy that of France. We had with us my sister-in-law, the Princess of Navarre, who afterwards married the Duc de Bar, my nephew. And I had a goodly train of maidens and of ladies, and my husband was followed by a noble troop of lords and gentlemen—as gallant a company as the best that I have seen at Court, with nothing to regret in them

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except that they were Huguenots. But we never mentioned the difference of faith. On the one hand, my husband and his sister went to *Prêches*; on the other, I, with my retinue, attended Mass in the Chapel in the park. And when I came out, we all met again and went for a stroll: sometimes in a beautiful garden with alleys of cypress and of laurel, sometimes in the park that I had made, with walks along the river. And the rest of the day passed in all sorts of pretty pleasures, which ended with a ball in the evening."

Navarre's reconciliation with the King was only skin-deep. At this juncture Henri III wished to promote it, for affairs had taken a fresh turn. Alençon suddenly fell dangerously ill, and Navarre was the next heir to the throne. Duplessis-Mornay, one of Navarre's best counsellors, wrote seriously to him. He must change his ways—a great moment might be at hand. "It is time, Sire," Mornay said, "that you should make love to all Christianity and especially to France." In a few days death put an end to Alençon's feverish futilities. He had never affected main issues and he left no footprint behind him. As usual, men said that he was poisoned. As usual, too, there is small reason to believe it. His constitution was thoroughly diseased, and the wonder is that he lived to be twenty-eight.

Between him and Catherine there had been no affection, yet she felt his death severely. It happened just as age was descending on her, and it came as a fatal blow to her hopes of a direct dynasty.

"Monsieur de Bellièvre," she writes, "my grief, which is such as you can fancy, will not let me write you a long letter. You can imagine what a misery it is to me to live so long that I see every one die before me. And although I know well enough that we must bow to the Will of God, that all belongs unto Him, that He only lends us our children for as long as He pleases—all the same, nature cannot contrive so well but that one resents the loss one suffers, and I, so it seems to me, have greater reason to complain of my sorrow, seeing that all my sons are taken from me excepting the single one who remains . . . I pray you beg the Queen of Navarre to cause me no increase of affliction."

Directly after Alençon's death, the Duc d'Epemon was posted off to Navarre to entreat him to abjure the Reformed faith and come back to the Court. But neither request met his views, and he did not obey.

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His defection would have been a serious blow to his cause, but a worse calamity had already befallen it. Three months before Alençon's death, the Prince of Orange, who not long before had married Coligny's daughter, Louise, was assassinated by a fanatic, whom a Jesuit had incited to the deed. The Catholics were strong at the moment. Parma had experienced constant success, and numbers of his subjects were returning to the Catholic fold. But the Northern States of Holland and Zealand rallied round Maurice of Nassau, the eighteen-year-old son of the Prince of Orange, andriesland too remained Protestant under Maurice's cousin, William of Nassau. These staunch provinces once more made proposals to France. In the same year they offered Alençon's principedom, with extended powers, to the King, overlooking his religion, because the French alliance was the most important source of strength they had to look to. Catherine and some of the nobles urged acceptance upon him. Elizabeth, also, changed her tactics. Frightened by the plots of Mary Stuart and the Jesuits, and by the maritime preparations of Spain, she sought to countermine the Spanish power. She herself invited France to the Netherlands and sent a sum of money to the French King by the hands of Flemish Ambassadors. He had been dallying, in terror of Philip. The embassy was impatient for his decision, but he kept them waiting. While he did so, came envoys from England with the Order of the Garter—an heretical honour which Henri accepted, much to the scandal of the Catholics. But it did not advance his answer to Elizabeth. Catherine did her best to keep the envoys in good temper by amusing them. "I was very pleased to see Lord Burleigh's son here to-day," she says. "He was brought by my secretary . . . who showed him this house and gardens, and my farm, of which I think he must have sometimes heard from my good sister, the Queen of England. I have often wished to send her fruit from my garden and meat from this very same farm; only the distance from here to England is so great that they might not carry well . . . which I should like her to know."

When Henri's answer came, it was what those who knew him best would expect. He refused the offer of the Flemings and they went home disillusioned.

The King was too busy with idleness to embark on any serious undertaking: at one moment, away on a pilgrimage with his wife, walking all the way from Paris to the crypt

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of Notre Dame at Chartres, and then on to Cléry, to pray for an heir; at another, surrounded by his Court and taken up with his wonted follies. In the three years between 1581 and 1584, the Mignons had increased their ascendancy and the power of Joyeuse and Epemon had risen to an insolent height. Joyeuse had been made Admiral of France, and to Epemon was given the Colonel-Generalship, as well as the lucrative government of Metz, Toul and Verdun. The wealth of both favourites was a scandal. The country was drained to give them luxuries. The fabulous wedding of the Duc de Joyeuse alone cost the nation eleven million francs—worth about thirty million of our own times. The festivities lasted seventeen days, and no lord or lady wore the same dress twice. The bride was Marguerite de Vaudemont, the Queen's sister, and her dowry was immense. To prevent jealousy, the Duc d'Epemon was married to another great lady, with a wedding gift of such a pearl necklace that the King had to break into the Municipal Treasury and double the price of Judgeships to buy it.

These extravagances were followed by outrageous penitential processions. The *Blancs-Battus*, the greatest grandees among the penitents, paraded the streets in the rain, dressed in sacks of white linen, "drenched through," until at last "all dripping as they were, they reached the Church of Notre Dame, there to perform the rites and mysteries peculiar to their Order." "And this they did," says a contemporary Diarist, "after a thousand insolences, the which they committed every day."

Catherine knew that evil must come of it, and the thought of the future dismayed her. She would, she felt, probably have to set out again upon her travels. "I shall," she said, "henceforth be so heavy and uncomfortable that it will become impossible for me to move about as I have done in the past. I do not want to go far. I can no longer endure hard toil as I used to do."

For the first time her letter sounds the wearied note of age that wants to rest.

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CHAPTER XIX

The Ligue

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CHAPTER XIX

The Ligue

THE death of Alençon was a turning point in French politics. It affected the balance of party-power. The accession of a Protestant Bourbon to the heirship of the Crown defined the position of the Catholic Guises, and they saw that, to be effectual, they must throw in their lot with Spain. At the same moment, England grasped that the hour had come for giving open aid to the cause of Protestantism. It was time to send an army to the Netherlands—it was time to put an end to the Catholic plots which wove themselves round Mary Stuart. The army was sent in 1584, under Leicester, and took part in the battle of Zutphen; while three years later, in 1587, Mary Queen of Scots was beheaded. The result for England was the Spanish Armada—for France, the activity of the Guisards. But this is to forestall matters; we are still in the year 1585.

For the next four years the stage was to be dominated by one central figure—that of Henri de Guise: brilliant, handsome and seductive, a gifted politician and a daring soldier, the idol of the people of Paris, their sovereign, and their typical hero. France is a dramatic nation, and she has always produced dramatic characters—among which this Duc de Guise was not the least striking. The Ligue, though he did not invent it, was, it may be said, his creation, and from this year onwards, it absorbed the nation's strength and attention. It was nominally a great federation, largely formed by Nobles and by Jesuits, to defend the Catholic religion. In reality, it meant something more. "The profession of the Catholic faith is not only an ancient custom, but the chief and fundamental law of the Kingdom," so ran the declaration of the *Etats Généraux*, in 1576, when the Ligue first made itself felt; and this formula implied a great deal else. For the Ligue represented a strange and unprecedented movement: it was at once anti-national and democratic; anti-national

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because it invited the support of Spain, and democratic because it undertook to champion certain popular rights, to make the *Vox populi* the voice of Guise. It was to redress taxation, to re-establish Parlements, to ensure the calling of the States-General at least once in every three years. It upheld the privileges of Corporations and of Communes. For once the tax-ridden masses could join hands with the lords of the land, unconscious that they were no more than tools in building up the fortunes of their leader. For, as need hardly be said, Guise was not a reformer from conviction. His advocacy of these liberal measures was but his cleverest bid for popularity and his sharpest weapon against the Crown. The Ligue was, first and foremost, an association of the Noblesse against the Throne, a conspiracy against the Bourbon succession. In his heart there lurked a further scheme—uncertain and dim—one day to seize the Crown himself—and, considering the love that he inspired, the ambition was by no means impracticable. He had many projects: to depose the King, to put him into a monastery; they had embodied themselves in a definite conspiracy as early as 1576. But the plot had been detected and Guise (whose name had been hidden behind that of his agent) was compelled to wait his moment in patience. He had taken the precaution to gain for himself a footing more substantial than the favour of the mob: to invent a family claim to the Throne as shadowy as it was insolent. The Capets, he urged, were tainted with illegitimacy, and could not boast the Divine Right of Charlemagne. The Lorraines now represented the legitimate line. And in case this statement should prove inadequate to his purpose, he proposed to strengthen his pretensions by marrying his relations to European royalties. But he was too wise as yet to put forth his own titles. When Catherine for a short while set up the son of her daughter, Claude, as Henri's successor, he "deceived her who had spent her life in deceiving," and feigned hearty agreement, while in public he pretended to acknowledge the old Cardinal de Bourbon as Heir-Apparent.

His plea in favour of Lorraine's dynasty was aristocratic in seeming; in point of fact, it did much to maintain the democratic colour of the Ligue. His arguments led to a Republicanism no less marked than that of the Protestants themselves. The right to the Throne, said the *Ligueurs*, did not lie in lineage, and the right to the Crown was elective, the only qualification being orthodoxy. But such Catholicism did not represent the Pope's beliefs, nor did it find favour with him.

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It put him into an untenable position. As the Head of the Church, he was obliged to join an alliance which professed to defend the faith ; as a potentate, he could not support the political views of the *Ligueurs*, or act as umpire between sovereign and subjects. Thus the final word rested with the People. They could make, or unmake a monarch. The pact by which the Throne was held "lay between the King, the People and God." If the King failed in his word to either, it would be justice to depose him, for "he and his officers were merely the ministers of the People." Unfortunately, the people at this juncture were largely in the hands of the Jesuits, in whose eyes assassination seemed a sanctified task. And thus, at the outset, it was possible for the Pope to maintain his false position and, together with the Jesuits and Spain, to give support to the Ligue ; a result which was probably the easier because the fundamental opposition between Ligue and Vatican was not as yet apparent, nor did the Pope himself perceive its significance.

But this state of things could not last. The real nature of his situation dawned upon him and he grasped the goal to which the Ligue was tending. He discovered that it represented a national creed, not an ecclesiastical one ; that the *Ligueurs* desired appointments in the Church to be decided by popular election. The results of their influence were seen without delay. The French clergy showed signs of disobedience to the Vatican and a Bishop refused to obey its orders. Hostility grew. "God has delivered us from a wicked and *Politique* Pope," said a favourite preacher after the death of Sixtus V—"Had he lived longer, Paris would have had a fine surprise. It would have heard us denounce the Pope from the pulpit." They did, indeed, more than denounce him : when he died, they consigned him "to the nethermost Hell." Ere long, the Pope had taken his stand against them. Rather than suffer the Ligue, he would have deposed Henri III and recognized the Huguenot Navarre as King of France.

Meanwhile, in March, 1585, the *Ligueurs* published their great manifesto, "in the name of God Almighty, King of Kings," setting forth their aims, and accompanied by the names of all the great Princes of Europe. It expressed the purpose of the *Ligueurs* throughout France, and the *ligues* in the Provinces were numerous ; but the typical Ligue, the epitome, as it were, of the rest, was the Ligue of Paris, and gradually this overtopped the others. It had originated with three priests and

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one layman—an important citizen. "No secret society," it has been said, "had ever more redoubtable statutes." Its constitution, completed in 1579, was a complicated one. Paris was divided into five big districts with five chiefs. Each member of the federation worked his own guild, and the "Horseleeches," the "Charcoal-burners," the "Mariners," had each a little Ligue of its own. The Mariners numbered five hundred, "*tous mauvais garçons*," not the only black sheep among the *Ligueurs*. There was also a subdivision of the city into sixteen constituencies, each of which returned a member to the famous Council of the Ligue, *Les Seize*. This gathering arose out of divers secret assemblies, chief among them the *Comité de surveillance*, whose duty it was to spy upon the King; and, growing in power with the movement, the Sixteen became the ruling force in Paris, in permanent relations with Guise. Later there was a Council of Forty, military and political, but the Sixteen remained the all-important organ. It corresponded with the other quarters of the city—the *Sainte-Union* this organization was called—and they sent forth emissaries to every town to urge good Catholics to band together in imitation of the Parisian model, and to communicate with this central association. A network was thus projected which would spread over the country, all the threads of which would be focussed at one point and gathered up by the ruling hand of Guise. He himself used his power with the Nobles, and carried with him most of the courtiers, among them, Nevers, Bellièvre, Villeroy, and others of the great men whom Catherine till now had called her own.

His success was, doubtless, helped by the events of the moment—by the victories of Parma, the murder of the Prince of Orange, the consequent ascendancy of Catholicism. The state of France and his own vogue did the rest. Between 1579 and 1585, thousands of Frenchmen had enrolled themselves—*gens du palais*, political enthusiasts, *bourgeois*, artisans, priests, Doctors of the Sorbonne—till the Ligue, in all its branches, embraced almost the whole of France. Then civil war began. It was to end in a Reign of Terror which foreshadowed that of 1794. In this same year, 1585, the Ligue had made a secret pact with Spain—the Treaty of Joinville, signed by all the big French Catholics—which undertook to defend the faith, to extirpate heretics, and to disinherit Henri de Navarre. It also made private bargains with Philip. He was to send troops; Guise was to fight the Flemish rebels

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and to give him Cambrai. The foreign allies soon Guise to put this agreement in execution, and, on to comply, he prepared for action.

One wing of his army was commanded by him by his brother, the Duc de Mayenne. Guise and his marched towards Châlons, which he intended to take. But before he could embark upon his task, the King had been seized by fright. He was in the midst of the Carnival and the thought of war was distasteful to him. He must pursue his pleasures at all costs, and peace must be ensured. He was thus in no mood to welcome an embassy which had arrived with overtures from Flanders, but hastened to dismiss it and to declare his wish to keep the peace with Spain. This was for the public. In private, Catherine was determined that Cambrai should not fall to Philip. It was Alençon's bequest to Henri; and to him, as a private person, it should come. Her efforts were attended by success, and Cambrai has remained French ever since.

The *Ligueurs* kept the mastery they had gained. They offered to lay down their arms, but only if the King granted their conditions. Henri replied, "not as a sovereign to rebels, but rather as a criminal to his judges." He made excuses for himself, he implored them to be loyal. His weakness only made them more audacious. Their numbers grew day by day: they took one town after another. An old Court favourite, François d'O, betrayed Caen into the hands of the Ligue. Catherine hastened to Champagne to treat with Guise—for a long while without success, as she found his pretensions were too great. Yet the King might have had all in his power. The means at his disposal were much larger than those of his foe, and England and Venice sent him money. His folly and density were incredible. When Navarre and the Huguenots made advances to him on their own account, he did not scruple first to trifle with them, then to reject their offers, although for no better reason than his personal dislike to them. His next move was to turn round and to approach the Ligue. But negotiations were a matter of time, and nobody trusted him. The *Catholiques royaux* alone rallied round him. The *Ligueurs*, the *Politiques*, and the Huguenots (chiefly in the South and West) formed the three remaining parties; and the issue of the game depended on their relation to each other—upon whether or not they joined forces. The mutual attitude of these factions had shifted in the last eight years.

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During that time one-third of the *Noblesse*, which meant one-thirtieth of the whole population, had become Huguenots; many lawyers and Crown officials were among the converts; there was a strong Protestant element in the army. And when we say Protestant, we mean Calvinist; for the difference between Calvinists and Lutherans was so great, that, whereas the Calvinist Mercenaries fought for the Reformers, the Lutherans supported the Crown. The *Politiques*, meanwhile, also increased in numbers and included every shade of moderate opinion, sweeping into their loose net those who fought for Guise and those who fought against him, the anti-Catholic and the anti-Spanish—all such, indeed, to quote Tavannes, as “preferred the safety of the realm and of their homes to the salvation of their souls; a Kingdom at peace without God, to a Kingdom at war, yet with God.” A ballad writer of that day has expressed the same feeling in another form.

Quel est ce monstre-ci, comment a-t-il nom,
Des Grecs est dit Sirène, et des Hébreux Dagon,
Et le siècle aujourd'hui *Politiques* l'appelle !
Mais dites moi pourquoi est-il femelle ?
Sa plus grande vertu est de chacun flatter,
Et des plus forts le cœur et le courage ôter.

The *Politiques*, it is true, like most advocates of compromise, were powerless in these agitated times, and significant rather because they upset the balance of party than because of anything they themselves achieved.

Among these quarrelsome groups, Catherine moved with her usual deftness and vigilance, interviewing Guise and other leaders of the enemy, talking, promising, deceiving. As usual she recounted her efforts to the King, in the frequent letters that she sent him.

“*Monsieur, mon fils*,” runs one of these, dated April, 1585, and written from Champagne—“This letter comes chiefly to tell you of the arrival of my nephew of Guise to-day at dinner-time. As he bowed low before me, he struck me as very melancholy, and when we had begun to talk, the tears ran down his cheeks, showing how sad he was. After I had most fully made him the remonstrances which seemed fitting in my eyes, promising him your pardon if he would only deserve it, and after exhorting him to talk frankly to me, he replied that he would confess himself to me truly on all points. But as it

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was late, I answered that he had better do then come and find me—as he did. You told him the truth of the matter. And the first and principal point of their pretences was religion, but I could quite well see that, as far as they are in a tight place. I told him that his action served to weaken our Church and to destroy it than to root out and I spent much breath in showing him . . . what experience has taught us, that peace has decreased the numbers of Huguenots more than any war. I begged him, too, to open his mind to me freely about the means we might take to avert this evil. But apparently he still kept his own counsel, in spite of every argument and remonstrance I could think of. I told him that I never believed they could have embarked on such an enterprise—that they did not know the port they wished to sail to. On the which he confessed that they wanted to present you with a petition and gave me to understand that he would very much like me to return to Paris.”

There was not much result from this meeting, nor from another which took place some twelve days later. The Queen-Mother described it to her son. “You will have heard” (she writes), “how the Cardinal de Bourbon and the Duc de Guise arrived here yesterday a little before supper-time. I must tell you that my cousin, the Cardinal, who has not quite got over his illness, wept and sighed very much indeed while I held him in my embrace, and showed his regret at having taken up these matters, all of which he talked about at some length. When I remonstrated with him, he frankly confessed that he had committed a great folly. One must, he said, commit one such in one’s lifetime, and this was his. And after we had once more spoken of the miseries that this war would cause and of the dangers that it involved, the Duc de Guise approached and entered into our discussion. But seeing that he remained as firm as ever in his recent resolutions, I changed my tactics and roundly accused him of the wrong he had done me. . . . This is how yesterday passed. This morning they came to see me about nine o’clock and heard Mass with me in my room. In the afternoon we had an assembly. The essential thing is certainly to do away with this pretext of religion which every chance agitator uses, and to substitute your pretext of loyalty; otherwise, the first malcontent who comes by will force us all to take up arms.”

There were further interviews, now amidst the green

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During meadows, now by the Queen-Mother's bedside. "The third de Guise," she wrote, "came to find me in the fields as I walked to Mass at Notre Dame de l'Épine, and his face showed me he was sadder than usual. I let him say all that he wanted, for he had been airing his mind in many words, which clearly proved he had something in his fancy. . . . For a long time, he only *half-talked*, and when I pressed him for the reason of his doings, he answered rather coldly."

On May 29, he found her in her bedroom among her friends.

"We could see," she said, "that Monsieur de Guise and all his party were greatly troubled and perplexed because we were so long talking together apart, and this time I made a point of lingering as long as I could, and hoped they would have such differences that we should be able to cause division among them. But Monsieur de Guise is just like a schoolmaster."

And, later still: "Guise gives every excuse he can, but nevertheless he said to me that he did not know which devil had plunged him into this, and he wished himself well out of it. Upon that we went to Vespers, and I did not like to begin on business."

The reward she reaped from her endeavours was the abject *Paix de Nemours*, in which, after faint objections, she ceded all the Ligue's demands. The King was to enforce the Catholic faith by edict, and heresy was to be stamped out, while the Huguenots lost their strong places, and the *Ligueur* Nobles got all the towns they asked for. Had the Queen-Mother been left to herself she would hardly have consented to such humiliation, but the King had many timid counsellors and was himself possessed by fear of Paris, the city of the Ligue. On July 13, he solemnly went with Catherine to Saint-Maur, to receive the homage of the Dukes of Guise and of Lorraine, and of the two scheming Cardinals, Guise and Bourbon; then to the Parlement to ratify the repeal of his Edicts of Tolerance and his proscription of the Reformed Religion.

This did not look well for Navarre. He had already made a fine retort (chiefly written, it was said, by Duplessis-Mornay), to the accusations which the Ligue had launched against him, and had warmly exonerated himself from the charges of disloyalty and schism. "If," he perorated, "conscience is there at the back, a difference of religion does not hinder a good Prince from getting good service from his subjects, whatever their belief." But he had not gauged the strength of Guise,

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and the conclusion of the Peace of Nemours brought him dire disappointment. "As I sat deep in thought upon this matter, my head leaning on my hand, my apprehension for this country was so acute that it turned the half of my moustache snow-white." So he says himself, when recounting his feelings at getting the news of the base treaty. Little he cared for the excommunication which Nevers wrung from the Pope against him and Condé, but their exclusion from the succession was another matter. And, indeed, had Spain been faithful to Guise instead of starving him for help and spending all its strength upon the Netherlands, Navarre would have been in hopeless case. As it was, he was in good spirits.

An alliance with him would have been the King's chance of salvation and, had the royal cause owned an efficient general, the union would have taken place. But the military leaders of the Court party were Epernon and Joyeuse. Epernon was, it is true, underneath all his extravagance, a man of courage and brain, who might have resisted the Ligue successfully. Unfortunately, his old vices turned upon him, and when he tried to stir up the King to action, Henri refused to take him seriously. He preferred to idle with Joyeuse, who was a mere fool, the idol of the *Jeunesse Dorée*; and His Majesty's interest in tactics was confined to the petty rivalries of his Mignons as commanders.

Guise, on his side, though his forces were swelling, relied chiefly upon help from "the Foreigner," a word that covered both the Mercenaries and the promises of Spain. A large proportion of his recruits were undisciplined shopkeepers, beggars and adventurers, no trustworthy support in times of danger. The Protestant allies, Navarre and Condé, alone maintained a dignified position.

Early in 1586, Guise went to Paris and was received with an ovation. The town was in a state of mad excitement. "One religion!" was the constant cry. The streets were thronged with religious processions: Princes shivering in their shirts; little children with wreaths on their heads, sharing the unwholesome ecstasy; disreputable ladies chanting *Misereres*; "des-titutes" trooping in from the provinces, robed in white and unduly exalted, singing in *patois* as they walked. The King enjoyed officiating at these functions. His mood was good; he gave Guise a kindly audience. That did not, however, mean peace, and he soon showed his real intentions by violating the Treaty of Nemours and trying to wring money from the

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clergy. There was a little dallying with Navarre and Catherine travelled south to visit him, but her efforts remained without result. Shortly after, came a new turn in affairs which threw the King back upon Guise. The Protestants of Europe resolved to make a signal stand with the King of Denmark as their head—an attempt to create some sort of unity among the professors of their faith. In pursuance of this aim they sent an army of Mercenaries to France to co-operate with Navarre, and act as counterbalance to the Ligue. The moment was crucial for the Catholics and the King could no longer shirk responsibility. Guise was also forced into the field. He and his sovereign saw nothing for it but to make common cause in the face of such a formidable foe. The King figured for the moment as the Head of the Ligue, a step which his mother strongly counselled.

In the autumn of 1587 began *la guerre des trois Henri*, Henri III, Henri de Guise, and Henri de Navarre. The King of France gave to Guise the command of the *Avant-Garde* and sent him against the Swiss and Casimir. A second army under Joyeuse was despatched to fight Navarre, who routed the French at Coutras in October, leaving Joyeuse dead upon the field. Henri III had one bad companion the less, and France was rid of an expensive scamp. The success was a signal one, but Navarre took it calmly. The room in which he dined after the battle was hung with the banners that had been captured, it resounded with acclamations. He alone sat calm and indifferent amid the rejoicings. Cold to his partisans, he showed human kindness to the prisoners. In his desire to console them, he even restored some of their flags. Civil war was not at all to his taste.

His victory was but for the moment. It was superseded by the triumphs of Guise, who, after twice routing the Mercenaries, was able to march towards Paris. The fictitious partnership between him and the King was bound to come to an end now that need for it was over, and their natural hostility flashed forth again. Guise was in serious difficulties. He was fatally crippled by his treacherous benefactor, Spain, yet knew not where else to turn for adequate support. "He could," it has been said, "act neither through the Spaniard, nor without him," for Spain, where it helped, demanded subordination in payment. "We have the King of Spain to thank for our survival," wrote the *Ligueur*, Villeroy, to Mayenne, but the survival meant political pauperism. Guise had not

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the Pope at his back—he was setting up a Papacy of his own which demanded independence of St. Peter's. Whatever he did, he must be the Head. Only two roads were open to him if Spain failed. He might coerce the King into an alliance on terms so ignominious that Guise would be practically left master; or he might achieve a *coup d'état* and seize Paris, the city which adored him. Both measures would mean something much like Henri's abdication, and the approach of Henri's conqueror to the Throne. Paris and the People would have been the easiest choice; with them he could have instantly effected a revolution. But he did not wish his enterprise to bear so illegal a name. He wanted to come off with all the honours of war, and if he were acting as a brigand, he would do it in the robes of a King. He intended posterity to know him as the royal deliverer of the nation, so he tried the more legitimate method first. Here he had invaluable aid, for Catherine was on his side. With her unerring instinct for the successful man, she recognized in him the power of the future, and hastened to wipe off old scores and to make friends with the children of darkness. This had not kept her, before she joined hands with him, from coquetting in secret with Navarre and dangling the succession before his eyes—for who knew when she might need him? Now she concentrated all her attentions upon Guise. And what she began in expediency ended in something like affection—perhaps we should rather say, fascination. She was an old and weary woman upon whose strength many had leaned. Age had brought her the wish to lean in her turn. In days not far from those of which we write, she came to call Guise "*le bâton de ma vieillesse*."

The concessions that the Duke demanded on behalf of the Ligue were embodied in the Articles of Nancy and were little short of insults to the King. The establishment of the Inquisition in France, the exclusion of Protestants from office, the handing over the gift of all appointments to Guise, were some of the conditions that he made. Henri refused to accept them; Catherine temporized; and, in the end, the King gave in. He would, he said, assent to these propositions provided that he might thenceforth dispose of the Ligue, and that Guise would not come to Paris. It is needless to add that he was not in good faith. Epernon, whose command had kept him in the field, had been busy corrupting the Mercenaries and persuading the Swiss to desert the Protestant army and join His Majesty's

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Swiss in Paris. He was now summoned by Henri and ordered to bring these hired troops with him, for what purpose the King best knew. Guise was on the watch for treachery. He, on his side, intended to deceive. From Soissons he sent word that, in spite of all, he would come in person to Court and proffer a Petition for Reform to the King. His presence, he said, was needful in Paris to check a conspiracy of the Huguenots which he knew was about to burst. Henri rejoined that he would not receive him, and the die was cast. Without waiting for further parleyings, Guise entered Paris in disguise.

It was a favourable moment for his coming. The city had flown to arms, and for some days it had been in tumult. Rumours were abroad that the Huguenots were going to massacre the Catholics and set Navarre upon the throne. Hatred for the heretics burned fierce. "Will it always be thus, you poor Catholics? Will you live on in this misery, expecting every hour that some one will come and cut your throats?" So ran a placard earlier in the year. "Do not temporize any longer!" it continued, "or there is fear that you will end by falling into the claws of those who have sworn allegiance to the Prince de Béarn. The whole city is full of them. Make them feel your hand, and let them know that your anger is against them, not against the King. All the highwaymen have turned Navarrists. Their trade brings them in more here than it would at the corner of some forest. But you, Messieurs de Paris, who have religion imprinted in your souls, see that you die before your time rather than linger on, as you do, only to prove their cruelty."

This is a characteristic piece of Ligue literature, and of such proselytizing stuff there was abundance. While the King sent for the Feuillants from Toulouse, and "made his retreat" at Saint-Bernardin, the Jesuits of the Ligue went about sowing their own more active form of Catholicism. From their pulpits they preached against the King no less than they preached against the Pope. They and their colleagues saw to the dissemination of eloquent pamphlets, to the gathering-in of recruits. And one of these colleagues—their chief agent—was more brilliantly effectual than themselves.

This was Madame de Montpensier, the sister of the Duc de Guise, whom Michelet calls "The Fury of the Ligue." To her, that movement was not only a family affair led by her brother, it was also her cause. No account of it, no picture of the Paris of the *Ligueurs* would be complete without her

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figure. Italian through her mother, Anna d'Este (now remarried to the Duc de Nemours), she united a Southern fire to the practical energy of the Frenchwoman. She was the first of those political women, those Arachnes of intrigue, in whom France was later to abound: the ancestress of Madame de Longueville and the Frondists; of Madame de Chevreuse and her schemers. Perhaps, also, of Madame Roland—but of Madame Roland with a touch of “*Demoiselle Théroigne*” astride her cannon, for Madame de Montpensier was a woman of fierce action, besides being a party-leader. With the energy of a religious revivalist, she worked for the furthering of the Ligue, seeking to net in converts by fair means or by foul. Some of her methods could only have been thought of by a woman. She had, for instance, ordered a picture to be painted of Queen Elizabeth torturing the Catholics, a masterpiece of inventive diplomacy, and she set it up in the Cemetery of Saint-Séverin. The *Politiques* called it “*le Tableau de Madame de Montpensier*,” while “the foolish people of Paris ran every day to look at it, and when they had seen it they grew excited, and cried out that all the wicked *Politiques* and Huguenots must be destroyed.” This painting grew to be such a source of danger that the King gave commands that it was to be removed—“but as secretly and quietly as could be, for fear of a disturbance”—and that same summer it had been stealthily carried off from the cemetery, while its donor, undiscouraged, cast about for fresh devices.

Her adversaries, not destitute of satire, have left something like a rough portrait of her in a skit upon her reading, a supposed catalogue of her library. It is so redolent of the Ligue and of its politicians that it is worth reprinting.

BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE MADAME DE MONTPENSIER.

The Pot-pourri of the Affairs of France translated from the Italian into French, by the Queen-Mother.

The Art of not believing in God, by M. de Bourges.

The Book of Ignorance, by Dr. Claude Marcel, Intendant of Finance. *Singular Treatise concerning the readiest method of making a solid House in a short time*; extract from a manuscript found among the papers of the late Messire Pierre Séguier, President of the Court.

Treatise in the shape of a paradox—to wit, that one can be made a Councillor at Court without knowing anything at all, by Monsieur de Grande-Rue.

Concerning Holy Ambition—which is conformable to the sacred canons and

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decrees of the Catholic Church, by Master Antoine Séguier, King's Advocate at the Court; recently printed in Paris, at the Sign of the "English Catholic."

The Masque of the great Hypocrite of Paris, shown up with his devotions—as practised by the Ligue.

The Minute of the Contract which the King is going to deliver to the Duc de Guise, by the which he is to give up his Realm into the hands of the Cardinal de Bourbon, First Prince of the Blood and Indirect Heir to the Crown, extracted from the secret Archives and Registers of the Ligue.

Published in Paris and at the Court,
where the corruption was such
that calumny and slander
were taken for
virtue.

In October, 1587.

Madame de Montpensier herself probably enjoyed the jest. Huguenots and Catholics were Frenchmen before they were sectarians, and the squib is of pure French birth. Rabelais, Molière, Voltaire, would not have despised it.

Nor, probably, did Montaigne. He was now in Paris, watching proceedings. "The Guises," he said sardonically, "are hardly Catholics, the King is hardly a Protestant." It was like him to hit the nail upon the head. The secret of the seething confusion was the absence of any conviction anywhere, the pretence of such conviction everywhere. Beneath the sheep's clothing there was not even a wolf, nor so much as a false belief—only negation. And when Revolution has no central point, right or wrong, round which to eddy, it spells chaos. The Ligue was but a bundle of paradoxes tied together by falsehood, for the interests of an ambitious man. It fought for greed and power under the name of religion; for the Nobles under the name of democracy; for the tyranny of one man, in the name of the freedom of many. It made against a bad and foolish King, but its weapons were selfishness and cunning. It awoke excitement instead of enthusiasm, and sowed discord without bestowing unity. To Catherine it brought a final Nemesis: it separated her from her son. Paradox—untruth—intrigue—sordid means to no end—the Ligue was, indeed, the natural harvest of Catherine's reign. She had sown in dust, she reaped the whirlwind.

CHAPTER XX

The Duc de Guise and the Revolution

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The Duc de Guise and the Revolution

WHEN Guise entered Paris, in May, 1588, he was between thirty and forty. His hair had turned white at the temples, but his eyes glowed with youthful fire. The only change in them was caused by the scar just below them. It "made him very prone to tears, so that he presented two aspects, smiling with one eye, weeping with the other." But nothing affected his personal charm and the old glamour still hung about him. It was rather increased than otherwise by his air of lazy melancholy. "The Duc de Guise," writes the Florentine envoy, "has lost the gaiety he used to have. . . . Is he regretting that his goal is missed? Is he brooding over new projects?" His manners were such as only a young god can afford. He was so sure of himself that he could do anything, and his familiarity never bred contempt. The people in the streets adored him, because, unestranged by rags and dirt, he always shook hands with them; and his manners with his own class were distinguished by their fastidious fineness.

He came into the town with great secrecy, only attended by five or six horsemen, his face muffled in a cloak beneath a large slouched hat. Purposely he got lost in the crowd, but his figure was too well known to escape notice. A young man came up to him, pulled down his cloak, lifted his hat from his head, and cried: "Monseigneur, show yourself to us!" A lady on the steps of a shop took off her mask: "*Bon Prince*," she said with a smile, "here you are! We are saved."¹ General recognition followed. In the Rue Saint-Honoré, and the Rue Saint-Denis, there were shouts of "*Vive Guise! Vive le pilier de l'Eglise!*" The mob pressed round him; they kissed his

¹ A contemporary historian records this incident as happening later in the day, when Guise accompanied Catherine to the Louvre. But no one would have dared to speak thus boldly in the presence of the Queen-Mother, and the story evidently belongs to Guise's first appearance in Paris.

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boots, they rubbed their rosaries against him to consecrate them ; flowers rained ; all was emotion. But Guise had only one object—he must see the Queen-Mother. He had come without the King's consent, and if any rumour of his arrival should reach Henri's ear before Guise had made his explanations, the result might be fatal. Ridden by vague fear he reached the Hôtel de Soissons, close by the Halle-aux-blés, and at once sought Catherine, who was staying there. She had been writing letters to prevent his return when he walked in. The first person to catch sight of him had been her dwarf who was standing at the window, and announced his approach. The Queen-Mother ordered the dwarf to be whipped for telling lies, but in another moment her tone changed. She turned pale and trembled from head to foot. Did she take him for one of her ill-starred visions ? For his trepidation equalled hers. His face, too, had lost its colour, his failing tongue stammered. When he regained his speech, he poured forth lame apologies. He was forced, he said, to come in quest of her. She must use her influence with the King and make him listen to the counsels of Guise ; it was of the greatest importance that he should do so and should change his course at once. Catherine lost no time in warning Henri of his coming, and she herself accompanied him to the Louvre. She was carried thither in her chair, and the Duke followed her on foot. The King was in his Privy Closet—he had just finished a crucial conversation, which had not served to calm his nerves. Catherine's message had thrown him into a state of violent agitation ; when he heard the news, he tottered and had to support himself upon a table. He sat down, leaning his elbow upon it, and covered his face with his hands. " Monsieur de Guise has come, although I told him not to," he exclaimed to a courtier who was with him. " If you were in my place and had given him these orders, and if he had taken no notice of them, tell me, what would you do ? " " Sire," replied the gentleman, " it seems to me there is but one word I need ask—do you hold M. de Guise to be your friend, or your enemy ? " The King was silent, but he made a gesture which expressed all that he thought. " Sire," resumed his adviser, " I think that I see the decision you should come to. If you will honour me by giving me this charge, I will, without causing you any further trouble, this day lay his head at your feet. Not a soul shall give a sign of disturbance. I pledge my life and honour upon it and I put them in your



HENRI DE LORRAINE, DUC DE GUISE.

DESSIN DU LOUVRE.

ECOLE FRANÇAISE.

From a photograph by A. Giraudon.

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hands." But the King refused—he was afraid, and so were several of his friends at the Court, who knew that Guise's death meant an insurrection and their probable destruction.

They were advising moderation when Guise and Catherine entered. At their approach the King had left his closet, and moved to a more public room. Guise was still pale and unstrung. He had passed up the palace stairs between two rows of naked swords, and his princely bows and greetings in the antechamber had been met by an ominous silence. As he came in, he made a low bow to His Majesty, "but was not so assured as usual." The King's face, as he looked at him, seemed altered; it showed signs of angry resolution. "Why have you come?" he asked curtly; then he addressed himself to Bellièvre who was standing by. "Were you not charged to say . . . ?" he began—but Bellièvre broke in at this point and attempted to explain. The King cut him short. "Enough!" he said, and, wheeling round, he turned his back upon Guise. Terror overcame the Duke; he had not a single ally near, and he was surrounded by enemies. How could he tell that he was not caught in a death-trap, that the next moment might not be his last? A prey to his emotions, he forgot the royal presence and sank down upon a coffer that was near him. The King had so much lost control of his feelings that he might be capable of any rashness. But reckless action, Catherine knew, would mean mortal danger—she must bring him to his senses. Coolly she took him to the window—she and Madame d'Uzès who was with her—and showed him the excited rabble which, eagerly pressing after Guise, had surged into the courtyard below. It was a good object lesson. Sudden fear possessed him in his turn, and the Duke, quick to perceive it, seized the moment and took his departure—"leaving the Queen-Mother to do the rest," says old Estoile in his Diary. "Nor would she let the King alone until she had appeased him, although resentment still smouldered in his heart."

Guise now adopted every precaution. Collecting all his followers and every *Ligueur* he could lay hands on, he hastened to take arms and to make himself safe in his Hôtel. By May 10, he was master of the situation, and, in very different fashion from the last time, attended by four hundred men who were all of them armed below their coats, he went to pay his respects to the King. He attended His Majesty at Mass, and then returned home in triumph, amid the acclamations of the

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people. After dining he went to see Catherine, and while he was with her the King came in. Alarmed by Guise's escort of the morning, he now showed the white feather, justifying himself for all he had done and abusing no one but "the Foreigners." They were, he said, in hiding all over Paris. Guise blandly offered to help His Majesty to drive them away. Henri felt the sting and lost his temper like a disappointed child. "I will break the spirit of Paris!" he cried. The interview did not bring a solution. Unhappily for himself, Henri let his anger govern him, and took this moment to reject his mother's counsels and act upon his own initiative. The Swiss, in the charge of Epemon, had not yet come into Paris. He chose to order their entry at this moment, when the arrival of so considerable a force would look as if he feared his people—as if he meant to challenge them to civil war. The Queen-Mother fathomed the folly of his action; she knew that the appearance of the Swiss was as a match set to tow; but her persuasions were powerless against the King's obstinacy. Her fears were immediately fulfilled. Directly Paris knew what had happened, a rumour got abroad that the King had summoned the Swiss to butcher the chief Catholics—that the massacre would take place next day and the city would be pillaged. There was a serious revolt of the students, and the whole town deserted the King. He saw his fatal blunder too late—the revolution had begun.

Guise had laid the scheme well and himself remained invisible. It was one of the Sixteen who gave the signal. At five o'clock in the morning of May 12, three men ran out from this gentleman's house, as if in haste, shouting "To arms!" At nine o'clock, the ecclesiastical quarter, with its churches and seminaries, was barricaded. The streets were in a state of turmoil; they resounded with the clang of swords, the noise of hurried footsteps. Guise appeared at the window of his Hôtel, the picture of nonchalance, in a white summer *négligé*, only half-awake, as he pretended. "*Eh! que fait-on donc?*" he asked carelessly, as if he knew of nothing that was happening. He remained the whole day at the window, watching the crowd. His work had all been done before and its result was a masterly manœuvre by which the King's troops were hemmed in between the barricades without any chance of escape. The news of this catastrophe plunged Henri in despair. He saw his crown slipping from his hand; it was only his worst foe who could save him, and he had to ignore the fact that that foe was

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inciting the rebellion against his rule. So low was he brought that he sent to Guise to beg him to rescue the soldiers whom Guise himself had trapped, and "to spare the blood of the Catholics." The Duke consented, glad enough to perform a feat of generosity which was sure to prove effective with the mob, as well as to have the joy of humiliating his great enemy. He came out into the warlike streets, and walked among the crowd with no weapon but a cane in his hand. "And the people vied one with the other as to who should shout '*Vive Guise!*' the loudest." But he affected displeasure thereat, and, taking off his big plumed hat (none knew he was laughing underneath it), he said unto them more than once, 'My friends, that is enough! Messieurs, that is too much! I beg you now to shout '*Vive le roi!*''" Sometimes the cry was changed to "*À Reims.*" Did the smile below the big hat grow subtler? The barricades went down at his bidding till most of them had vanished; he sent the *Gardes* back to the Louvre; he restored their arms to the denuded Swiss. "*Une simple défense,*" without further action, was all that he suggested. He had but to hold up his hand and the royal troops were saved. Nor had he miscalculated the success of his strategic chivalry. By the evening of that day he was almost a deity in Paris. Men knelt before him in the mud. "And the fury of this imbecile populace was hushed at the mere sound of his voice, so besotted were they by the love of him"—thus sums up a sturdy old Protestant, who probably witnessed what he spoke of. But Guise knew perfectly well that he had not stemmed the torrent and that it was rolling whither it willed.

It was a *Ligueur* lawyer, a skilful agitator, very active at the barricades, who had stirred up the citizens to fresh enterprise against the King. "Courage, Messieurs!" he called out with an oath, "you have been too patient. Let us go and barricade this wretch of a King in his Louvre." And the words were no empty threat—they filled the air with foreboding. That night Henri was haunted by a presentiment that he was about to be murdered. He lay sleepless on his pillow, and men with naked swords in their hands surrounded his bed. The tumult outside went on till morning, with brawls and with much "pavement bravery," as the chronicler calls it, and the day that followed, the 13th, promised worse. Terror-stricken, the Prévôt and Échevin, together with some of the City Captains, hastened to the palace and implored the King to try and

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stop the rebels, or he would lose Paris. "The King, endeavouring to calm his countenance, the which had become exceeding sad," replied that if the people would lay down arms and destroy the barricades, he was willing to do anything—to remove his troops ten leagues out of Paris, to countermand his orders for fresh regiments. The officials departed in despair—such remedies were useless. Catherine did not deceive herself. That day she wept all through dinner ; she knew that the time had come when she would have a mortal struggle to keep her power and the throne. But she did not quail before danger. With indomitable energy, she set out for the Hôtel de Guise. The streets were fraught with the perils of war and blocked by barricades. Those who kept them would hardly let her litter pass. When at last she stood before Guise, she put off her pride. She entreated him to quench the fire he had lighted and to come and see the King, who would make it worth his while. "But the Duke, with a very cold manner, replied that he was sincerely sorry ; it was a question of the mob, and the mob was a herd of enraged bulls whom it was hard to restrain. As for going to the King, the Louvre was a place to inspire strange suspicions ; it would be great weakness of mind in him to go there and put himself, defenceless, in undress, at the mercy of his enemies." Catherine returned home baffled, and the cool-headed Duke went forth into the city, which was hourly becoming more wrought-up, and, collecting his forces, took possession of the Hôtel de Ville and the Arsenal.

His despotic ally, Spain, was not idle ; she was working through her agents, the monks, and urging the barricading of the Louvre. What Philip hoped for was the murder of the King, more easily practicable in his palace, and thus for a freer field for himself. With Guise he had no doubt he could deal when the right moment came. There were dangerous mutterings among the students of the Jesuit-ridden University—mutterings, waxing ever louder, that "they would go and fetch Brother Henri from the Louvre"—which were auspicious for the Escorial. But Philip, self-confident as ever, was blind to the real obstacle to the assassination. Guise did not wish it, it did not tally with his interests ; he must have the people at his back, and, although they hated their sovereign, regicide was still a crime in their eyes. As long as the flimsy King was alive, Guise himself was King of Paris, and beyond it ; if the King were killed by his connivance, he would lose both prestige and power. And he would be the mere "valet of Spain"—a

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reason which did not weigh least in his counsels. But the Louvre could be besieged without murder ; such a project only furthered his designs.

His purpose was helped by a blunder of Catherine's. She and the Parlement, wishing to conciliate Paris, persuaded Henri to send away his extra troops from the palace, which was thus left inadequately guarded against the forces that sat down before it. On May 13, Guise and his men began to barricade the doors of the Louvre. They were reinforced by some seven hundred undergraduates, and three or four hundred monks from "all the monasteries," led by the popular preachers and the Comte de Brissac, their Colonel ; and all inspired, as they marched in unruly order through alleys, over bridges, by one cry : " We will have Brother Henri." They worked up the populace to fresh fury—it seethed and swayed and roared round the palace ; Madame de Montpensier patrolled the streets, inciting them still further ; the tocsin sounded ; all was confusion. The whole scene was, as it were, a foreshadowing of another, nearly two hundred years later. Guise let them think that they had their way ; he dominated the situation. Every door was guarded by his commands, excepting one, the door towards the Tuileries—most likely a deliberate omission to give the King a chance of escape. He was not slow to take it. At five o'clock that evening, he walked from the Louvre to the Tuileries, whip in hand, as if for an ordinary ride. There was a moment when he broke down in his part, with a kind of dramatic emotion. Leaning against the stonework of his palace, he burst into tears. " Oh, ungrateful city ! " he cried—" I have loved you better than my own wife." But he had no time to lose and he pulled himself together. Once in his stable, he prepared to get upon his horse. One of his courtiers was kneeling to draw on his boots for him and carefully reversed the spurs, as if for a short excursion. " That does not matter," said Henri, " I am not going to visit my mistress—we have a longer journey before us." Such of his friends as had mounts followed his example, hurrying off just as they were, unbooted and in heavy court clothes. The Duc de Montpensier, the Maréchal de Biron, the Chancellor, were among them. Of the others, some followed on foot and the rest remained behind. As soon as he was outside the walls, he raised his head and shook it, with a " God be praised, the yoke is off ! " Then solemnly he cursed his town of Paris ; she had been, he cried, " perfidious and ungrateful." " He

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would never return to her again, excepting by a breach in her walls." In an instant he was laughing aloud. "Come along—*à la bonne heure!*" he cried, and they rode off towards Saint-Cloud.

He had taken care to put Catherine off the scent. He had begged her to go out that afternoon to find the Duke and to try and pacify the rebels. But at six o'clock she was back in her own apartments. She was sitting there when one Menneville, a friend of the Duc de Guise, came up to her. "The King has gone," he whispered in her ear. There was silent consternation. Not long after, a messenger arrived for Queen Louise from her husband. He sent word to her of his departure, and she, the one being beside his mother who loved him, broke down, weeping, and would not be consoled.

The King slept that night, "*tout botté*," at Rambouillet, and went on next day, the 14th, to Chartres. His Guard and some of his Swiss had joined him, and now he felt secure. He was soon boasting of his cleverness in escaping from Paris as he had escaped from Cracow. With his customary puerility he was only thinking of the moment, nor did he recognize the true import of what he had done. When he committed the abject blunder of fleeing from Paris, he had practically abdicated his prerogative. The Crown was still upon his head, but real authority was his no more. Guise was the people's King for the hour, and, afar off, Navarre was cheerfully watching events. When the news of the "Day of the Barricades" was taken to him, he rose from the stately green bed on which he was reposing. "They have not yet caught *le Béarnais*," he said gaily. *Le Béarnais* was awaiting his opportunity, and he knew he would not have long to wait. For although Guise's triumph seemed complete, it was not of the sort that endures. It was said at the time that "the two Henris had both played the ass to perfection, the one, the King, because he had not had the courage to carry out what he had undertaken, although, till eleven, and past, on the Day of the Barricades, he had means and leisure to do so; and the other (Guise) because he allowed the wild beast which he had in the nets to escape." The criticism of Guise was a just one. "He must be Cæsar or nothing," said old Estoile. . . . "Who has once drunk of the wine of the gods must never acknowledge himself mortal." But Guise had not the strength to drink the whole of the cup. At heart a superb aristocrat, he detested

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the ways of the mob—those tools that he was using for his purpose—and his disgust weakened his patience. Had he been a Cæsar, his personal distastes would not have counted, and his powers of endurance would have sufficed him.

But at present all promised him success. The Bastille capitulated. He lost no time in finding prisoners to fill it, and the Provost of the Merchants was the first. The police and the supplies were now in the conqueror's hands, and he was strong enough to turn out the reigning officials. The next thing was to form a provisional government, and on May 28, the Commune was instituted by a Council at the Hôtel de Ville. It meant no more than an association of ministerial brigands, and Guise appointed a disreputable lawyer, Bussy Leclerc, to be the Governor of the Bastille. Under these circumstances, it was not surprising that one of the next prisoners should be Montaigne—arrested on a suspicion of Royalism. He was quickly released, at Catherine's demand, but the incident shows the general insecurity. The Queen-Mother also asked for the deliverance of the Provost of the Merchants. "If it please you, Madam," Guise replied, "that he come out, I will go myself to fetch him and will lead him by the hand into your presence; but he is safer there than in his own house." Insults were heaped upon officials. The sermons of the Jesuits against the Court waxed bolder, and encouraged by the fear that they inspired, they dared to preach against personages present. Cruelty alternated with high spirits. "*Valet à louer*," was what the rioters wrote upon the door of the house where the King's Advocate was lodging, and although it was repeatedly rubbed out, they took the pains each time to re-write it. Squibs, lampoons, and ballads poured forth—all coarse, and some brilliant; the universal *furor* was complete. Fanatics of every sort and from every motive—greed, ambition, hysterical desire for martyrdom—pervaded every purlieu. There were monks in armour, there were great ladies in undress.

It was a fitting moment for the arrival of the Guise family. On May 15, the Duchess and her children, in the company of her brother-in-law, the Duc d'Elbœuf, and their ally, the Cardinal de Bourbon, appeared in Paris, and although they did not stay there, their coming did not serve to calm the crowd. Still less so did the militant lady of Montpensier. "In these days," runs an old record, "Madame de Montpensier, *contente à merveille*, was unable to dissemble the joy that was

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imprinted upon her countenance and even more upon her heart. And she came, out of pure bravado, to lodge in the Hôtel de Montmorency (the home of the Guises' bitterest enemies), putting aside all the respect which is customarily shown to the houses of Nobles of this quality. For the which the Queen-Mother reproved her. "What would you have me do, Madame?" she answered—"I am only like those brave soldiers whose hearts are big with victory."

Had she, the fanatic, led affairs, perhaps they would have gone differently. Guise was no fanatic, but a cynic, although romance and ambition hid the fact. His disgust of the populace began to tell, none the less because, even then, in the moment of success, there were scattered signs of a Royalist reaction. All his aims and energies henceforth centred upon getting hold of the King. Approaches were made to him at once, and thirty Capucins and Flagellants set out barefoot from Paris to Chartres, headed by a converted worldling, the brother of Joyeuse, who carried the Cross in his hand. "In this costume," had said the *Ligueurs*, "the King will be forced to receive us; he cannot shut his door against us." The masquerading penitents marched into the city, chanting, while the people of Chartres poured forth, agape to see them, "some admiring . . . some mocking . . . and many more offended." Not without cause. When they came before Henri, they acted "a new Mystery" for his benefit, so profane that it is only worth recalling because it illustrates the general topsy-turviness of men's notions. The brother of Joyeuse impersonated the Crucified, entering the royal presence as if bowed down by a great cardboard cross, a crown of thorns upon his head. He was surrounded by the Roman soldiers, wearing saucepans for helmets and suits of rusty armour, and while they rolled their eyes in crude melodrama, the Holy Women, played by two Capucin monks, wept, prayed and prostrated themselves. There followed the Flagellation. The central figure fell down, was lifted up again—and this was the end of the performance. It was meant to convey to Henri that as this Flagellation had been forgiven, so the *Ligueurs* might likewise win his pardon. It was, perhaps, to be expected that one of the Apostles, the Président Neuilly, was a spy, who proceeded to work up Chartres against him. This gentleman, it seems had the valuable gift of shedding tears at will. At one of Henri's interviews with the *Ligueurs*, he harangued the King, and, stirred by his own eloquence, he began to cry "like a calf,"

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excusing himself for what had happened. "*Hé!* fool that you are," said Henri, "do you think that if I had wished to do you a bad turn, I could not have done it? No, no, I love the people of Paris, in spite of themselves." But no one was duped by his bluster, and the grotesque embassy returned unsatisfied.

Guise did not mean to stop till he got at least the Lieutenant-Generalship. With the help of the Queen-Mother he had at last subjugated the Parlement, which had hitherto opposed him, and it was not long before he sent a second deputation to Chartres. The King gave them many fine words, and he promised to summon the States-General, but the Ligue wanted more than this. They had, they averred, barricaded the capital in defence of the Catholic Faith, and now they demanded Boulogne, Metz, and Angoulême. It was Epernon who wished to refuse their conditions, and Epernon was worse hated than the King. A pamphlet was published against him called "*The History of Pierre Gaveston*," which drew a threatening parallel between the fate of Edward II's favourite and the destiny that would probably one day be his. A crisis came when a drove of mules, richly covered with trappings bearing Catherine's monogram, was stopped, in spite of her passport, at the Porte Saint-Jacques. As soon as the coverings were lifted, the animals were found to be laden with Epernon's furniture and silver, no longer safe in his house. The mules were turned homewards and their precious freight was taken to the Hôtel de Ville. Paris grew too hot to hold the ex-Mignon. In due time, helped by Navarre, he escaped, deserted by his craven friend, the King, who was living in a state of panic, now afraid of Epernon and his own friends, now reverting to his dread of Spain. On July 10, he gave his last chance away and signed the *Acte d'Union*¹ at Rouen, a pact with the Ligue by which he yielded everything to them. No office could be held without an "attestation" from the candidate's bishop, or his curé, and the kingdom was to submit to the Pope. The Protestant succession was to be renounced, Guise was to be Commander-in-chief of the army and the heir to the crown, and his brother, Mayenne, was to lead a force against the Protestants, while there was to be a general distribution of honours among his other brothers. Epernon was to be disgraced, and the

¹ This compact was embodied in the *Traité de Rouen*—the two documents being practically synonymous.

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States-General were to be convoked. To this Treaty, perfidious even for Henri, he set his royal seal without making further demur. It is true that, in return, the Ligue promised to renounce alliance with "the Foreigner," but the promise was the hollowest of lies and no one who made it dreamed of keeping it.

Catherine was in despair. For once her troubles had overwhelmed her. Her powers were failing; her son was beyond her reach. Her last attempt to keep the succession in her hands, through the claims of her grandson of Lorraine, had come to nought; the Valois dynasty, the object of her dreams and sacrifices, was tottering before her eyes, and she was caught, helpless, her feet entangled in the meshes of the Ligue. When her weariness and cares grew too crushing, she would bid her Swiss carry her "Chair" outside the city gates and put her down awhile in the green meadows. The Catherine of ten years earlier would not have turned to Nature for refreshment.

No real breathing space, however, was allowed her. All her endeavours from Paris to change the mind of her absent son were fruitless, and on July 23, she went off to find him at Mantes, where he happened to be staying at the moment. Here, charged by Guise to do so, she begged that he would come back to "his good town of Paris." But she only got a blank refusal and, on the 27th, she returned. Three days later she started forth again, this time with Guise and eighty horse to back her, together with the Cardinal de Bourbon, and his archers in crimson velvet trimmed with gold. There were other grandees besides, but all their efforts were useless. When Catherine appealed to the King, he replied that he would grant her any other thing she wished for, but that this was impossible and she must cease from asking for it. "Whereupon, having recourse to tears, the which she always had at command, she spoke unto him. 'Oh, my son,' quoth she, 'what will people say of me, and what will they think when they see that I, whom God made your mother, count for so little with you? Is it possible that you have suddenly changed your nature? Of old, you had a good disposition, generous and very quick to pardon.' 'Quite true, Madame,' lightly rejoined the King, 'but how in the world can I help it? It is that wicked Epernon (and here he laughed) who has ruined . . . my good disposition.' And this was all she could get out of him."

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Four days later Guise made another attempt, this time alone. He found his sovereign at Chartres, and they sat down to dinner together. At this meeting, nearly three months after the last, in Paris, Guise was easily the master, without any need of armed men. Yet, in secret, he must have trembled more than ever, as he broke the bread of the man who had every motive to kill him. The Duke, with his careless manners and keen spirit, his fair hair "turning white at the temples"—the dark King, Southern and demonstrative, but mortally cold at the core—sat once more facing each other with supreme distrust. "Fill my glass," said the King jovially, and when he had been obeyed, "To whom shall we drink?" he added. "To whom you please, Sire—it is for you to command." "Cousin" (Henri grew malicious), "let us drink to our good friends, the Huguenots." "Well spoken, Sire!" The Duke's tone was careless and the King was not behindhand. "Nor must we," quoth he, "forget our good Barricaders of Paris—let us drink to them also!" The Duke duly drank the toast; and, as he did so, he "gave an *under-laugh* (but a laugh which did not pass the apple of his throat), and soon after, he withdrew, vexed and brooding. He was ill-pleased at the King's new-fangled union between Huguenots and Barricaders." Had that terrible smile, that under-laugh which turned inwards, taken effect upon the King? Whether from fear or other motives, he made Guise his Lieutenant, "with magnificent laudations"; he allowed the Cardinal de Bourbon all the privileges of "his nearest of blood"; he lavished favours upon the Ligue. "Paris, itself King and Pope" (to use his own phrase), "might yet, he thought, be cheated back into his service. Were not the States-General to meet as he had promised? Eyes had he, and he saw not.

The puzzling part of the story is the course pursued by Guise. He aimed in secret at the Throne. Then why, when he was King of Paris, did he not make himself King of France? The answer, like the answer to most of the enigmas of the day, lies with Spain. She was jealous, suspicious, ever watchful for her own interests. Although she was nominally his ally, Guise knew that he could not count upon her; that in any enterprise that made for his aggrandizement, she would see through his schemes and certainly fail him. Yet without her help he could not attempt to take France by storm. His popularity in the country did not counterbalance the army of

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Navarre, and his material resources were insufficient. Had matters been otherwise, the House of Lorraine might have reigned over France. What would have happened in that case belongs to the might-have-beens of History.

CHAPTER XXI

The Murder of Henri, Duc de Guise

THE
JOURNAL OF THE
ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE

CHAPTER XXI

The Murder of Henri, Duc de Guise

THE Queen-Mother was worn out. Her amazing vitality was flagging—she was even known to fall asleep while she was writing. And her cares were by no means of the past. Although the immediate risk from the Ligue was over, her public troubles, as she knew, were not ended. As if they were not bad enough, she had been assailed by private distresses. The conduct of the Queen of Navarre had caused her acute humiliation. Three years since, in 1585, Marguerite had again left her husband. Her love affairs made their life together impossible, and the difficulty was increased by her continued choice of disreputable ladies as attendants, the cause of no infrequent quarrels between the mercurial pair. Bent upon making an independent position for herself, she retired to her own dominion, the fortified city of Agen.

Henri remained perfectly good-tempered. He had nicknames for himself and his wife: "Salmon" for himself, and "the Lady with the camels" for Margot—but the reason of these jests is not apparent. There were efforts at a reconciliation. "Salmon," he says, with covert malice, "is not accustomed to dealing with women. It is no part of their business to yield honourably like soldiers, or of his to do them any displeasure." The tone of his letters about Margot, is not respectful.

"A man came from 'the Lady of the camels,'" he wrote to the Comtesse de Grammont, "to ask me to give her a passport, so that five hundred barrels of wine for her enjoyment might be got through without paying duty; and thus it stands written in the paper. It is as good as a parchment declaration of inebriety. I refused, for fear she should tumble from the perilous height of her saddle. What an outrageous piece of wine-bibbing! the 'Queen of Tarvassef' never managed half as much."

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Agen soon discovered the nature of its mistress. She was, as usual, a firebrand in the place ; she was poor, with no settled pension, and she tried to wring money from her subjects. The consequence was that they rose and drove her out of the city. She was obliged to flee suddenly "by the back door of the citadel," and to gallop off hastily "*en croupe*." "But she did not forget," adds her secretary, "to take her best rings with her, nor yet her Madame de Duras, who also departed in the saddle." And while they rode off in security, her faithful followers fought the citizens and many gave their lives for her sake.

This was in October, 1587, and she made her way as best she could to her mother's house at Ivry. But Catherine, in her anger, refused to treat her as a guest, and took her prisoner. Marguerite played the injured woman.

"It was," she writes, "on *her* assurance, by her orders, that I took refuge with her, and instead of the good treatment I expected, I only found shame and annihilation. She brought me into the world ; she wants to hunt me out of it. But patience !" Catherine's exclamation is more poignant. "For me these tribulations are so great that I am almost beside myself !" The words are wrung from her heart.

Still a prisoner, Margot was brought to her husband's strong Château at Usson. Her escort was the Marquis de Cavillac, and she characteristically avenged herself upon him by first making him her lover and then dismissing him ignominiously from the house. This did not help matters, and her husband did not mitigate her confinement. It was now that Marguerite showed her true strength of character. Finding resistance useless, she made the best of her situation, asserted herself as mistress of her "free and impregnable fortress," and settled down to a leisurely life of solitude and study.

In her husband's eyes she could not be a heroine. Her doings had succeeded in upsetting his unconquered equanimity. He now easily lost his temper ; his eyes flashed, his gay speech turned sour, and even his sarcasm grew violent. "I am only waiting," he exclaimed, "for the hour when I shall get the news that some one has sent some one to strangle the late Queen of Navarre. That, together with the death of her mother, will make me sing the Song of Simeon with a full heart." When Catherine reproached him with his altered mood, "Madame," he replied, "it is true that the thwartings

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and ill-treatment to which you have subjected me have changed me and made me lose what I had by nature." The thought of the succession, as well as the thought of his wife, was not unconnected with his bitterness. "I know what he can do and, better still, what he cannot do," he said, speaking of the King.

They were hostile words, and he was no easy adversary to cope with when he arrived at Blois for the States-General. The Queen-Mother was lodging just below her son, so that she might keep a close watch upon his actions and upon his very footsteps. She did not realize how far he had got from her controlling hand. He had begun by reading his despatches alone—he had come to doing most things without her help. He had even shut her out of his Council. Every day must have borne the fact more strongly and cruelly in upon her, and it drove her the more urgently into intimacy with Guise. He had arrived in Blois and, constantly closeted with her, he was in her secret counsels. As matters stood now, the relations of parties had changed, and their programme, if truthfully written, would have stood as "Catherine and the Ligue against the King."

With regard to Spain, too, the ground had shifted. Philip had resented Guise's compact with Henri. The article renouncing foreign alliances belied Guise's treaty with himself. He took a leaf out of the Duke's book and made a separate agreement with Henri III, by which he promised to send him help. It was never fulfilled. The pledge was given in July; by September, his forces were needed elsewhere, and the defeat of the Armada left him a crushed man, a crippled sovereign. The French King, perceiving this and what it meant, had quickly deserted Philip, who, needing some source of support in France, once more made overtures to Guise. And Guise, who had plenty of good reasons for distrusting Henri and all he said, was not slow to accept the Spanish offers, so that by the time they met at Blois, the Duke and the King were again mortal enemies.

It may well be asked why Guise ventured to come there and so put himself into Henri's power. At first his action looks like pure bravado, but its reason really lay in the King's impotence. He was demoralized—incapable of action—and was generally held to be so. Neither Catherine, nor Guise himself dreamed that Henri would do anything decisive, anything which involved immediate risk to himself, and the danger

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may well have seemed less to the Duke than it had been for many months before. Nor was he the man to shirk it, were it there.

The *Etats*, largely made up of *Ligueurs*, met in November, 1588. Their protests and demands were manifold and uncompromising, embracing every kind of reform. Pluralism and non-residence were to be abolished, together with the holding of benefices by laymen, by ladies, or by Huguenots. The system of purchasing office was to be swept away, while all financial officials were to be forced to disgorge their ill-gotten gains, and, for the future, to give account of their stewardship; and their number which, including political officials, now fabulously exceeded its normal level, was to be reduced to something nearer common sense. Henri spoke fluently. Afraid of all parties, he used cautious language. The *Etats*, one with the Ligue, met him with angry protests against his tolerance. "One religion!" was all their cry. And he further irritated them by a tactless allusion to the barricading of Paris. They took their vengeance. At a sitting two days later, they extracted fresh oaths of adherence to the Ligue from their monarch. Had they been more superstitious and less confident, they might have trembled for themselves. While they were achieving their purpose, the sky was suddenly darkened, a storm of hail burst outside, and night fell in a moment—in broad daylight—"so that in the Hall of Assembly torches had to be lighted before it was possible to read and write. And some who were there present muttered below their breath . . . that the Will of the King and of France was being made, and the candle had been lighted that men might see them breathe their last breath." The affair ended in the ratification of the *Sainte-Union* once more by the pusillanimous King.

Religion was not his only stumbling-block; money grievances were as bad, if not worse. He needed funds which his subjects would not grant. In vain he played at humility with the *députés*. "*Peccavi*—I have offended God—I know it, Gentlemen," he said, "but I will amend my ways; I will put my household on a smaller footing. Where there were two capons, there will henceforth be only one. But to refuse me money is to ruin me, to ruin yourselves, to ruin the State." His audience knew that his words were only wind. They begged him to behave as a King, but they did not increase his supplies. His distress increased, his coffers were empty.

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And meanwhile his Guard was unpaid, and the forty-five gentlemen who formed it went forth to seek a living elsewhere. The love that made the followers of Charles I, or of Marie Antoinette serve for nothing kept very far from Henri III of France. Little was left him but "a deserted Court, a cold kitchen, and long faces." And there was scant hope in the prospect before him.

Again he appealed to Guise. He had made him his right hand—his Grand-Maître; it was just that Guise should give some return. Would the Duke beg an alms for him from the Ligue? Guise complied, but the *Ligueurs* refused their consent. Guise laughed with careless insolence. Some one of the King's remaining friends heard him. "The King's saucepan has upset, Sirs," this person cried, "let us go and make it *boil* again." Guise may, or may not, have understood to what conflagration they alluded, but he went no less fearless on his way, confident of Henri's want of resolution. And he did not lack opportunity to prove it. His intimacy with Catherine made him cognisant of each sordid detail of the King's life, of the way in which he spent every hour. He lodged, besides, in the royal palace, and his position as Grand-Maître gave him its keys, so that he passed in and out at will. Superb and secretive as he was, his whole bearing expressed deep designs, and many men must have suspected them. There was even a murmur that, at a banquet, his brother, the Cardinal, had drunk to the success of a plot to carry off Henri III by force to Paris, and to the health of the Duke as King of France. It was not a rumour to appease the reigning monarch.

Henri's fears were, indeed, fully roused. Whether he had offered the Grand-Mastership as bribe, or as blind it is hard to say, but the thought of murdering his enemy had long been simmering in his head, and had been taken out and put away again as occasion demanded. He knew that the act would be a mortal peril to himself—that Paris might rise in revenge—nor did he mean to dare such a risk unless the danger from Guise grew stronger. And now, or so he thought, the moment was there. Public report confirmed his dark imaginings; Guise's very deportment lent them credence. And never had he himself been so friendless, so destitute of outside support. His relations with his mother, always cold, at this moment were more strained than usual. She had even shown him anger because he had done what was, perhaps,

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the wisest deed of his life, and had sent away his Council, and his "*âmes damnées*," Villeroi and Chéverny, who were among its members. He thus found himself surrounded by new faces—by men as unknown to him as he to them—and with no trusted arm to lean on. And abroad, likewise, there were none on whom he could rely. He felt uncertain whether the Pope would help him against Guise and Spain. As for Spain, the fear of offending her had probably been his most powerful motive for withholding his hand from Guise's throat. It was only when news came of Philip's dire defeat that the hatred of France for the Spaniard openly leaped forth. "Lost, somewhere off the English coast, the magnificent Armada," so ran the placards of Paris,—“anybody bringing information of its whereabouts to the Spanish Embassy shall receive five crowns reward.” But Henri had more cause to mourn than to triumph, for Spain was made useless as an ally. His only chance now lay with Navarre. The *Etats*, it is true, had decided that war with that Prince should continue, but this was no obstacle to Henri. Navarre's right hand Sully was at Blois. The King secretly sent for him and told him there was nothing he should like better than an alliance with his master, but how was this possible while Guise lived? It was not for Sully to supply the answer.

Henri III was not a Medici for nothing. The cowardice of assassination did not revolt him as it would have revolted his father and his grandfather. In them, generosity created a kind of morality independent of morals, but in him, there was no finer sense to shock. He had inherited his mother's capacity for fear, and the panic that had forced her into the awful error of the massacre of St. Bartholomew now forced her son into the fatal blunder of the murder of Guise.

It was four o'clock and almost dusk on the afternoon of November 30. The pages of Guise were loitering in the palace courtyard, waiting for their master; so were the pages of His Majesty. Other attendants were there, all violent partisans of their lords. Brawls between the servants of great gentlemen were in fashion, and there was nothing out of the common when, on this particular evening, a quarrel arose between those present. But the combatants were envenomed, excitement turned to deadly earnest, and the free fight became a battle. Life was lost, and the Cardinal de Guise, in soldierly attire, led the troops he had summoned to the Château. Commotion spread. Such *députés* as were

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Ligueurs left the *Etats* and mustered round Guise, and a few nobles gathered round the King. Indoors, there were panic and confusion. The battle had spread into His Majesty's ante-chamber; he himself came forth, armed, from his closet, in the greatest agitation. Guise, who was sitting with Catherine, was nonchalant as ever. He did not stir from his place. "*Ce n'est rien*," he said, and went on talking to her. His gentlemen came to inquire for his commands, and found him staring idly into the fire. It was the courtier, Crillon, who finally quenched the tumult by threats of the rod and of imprisonment for any man who should move from where he was.

However dare-devil Guise may have been, he must have sighted fresh perils on all sides. Many of the nobles had grown cold towards him; most were jealous, some were suspicious. Paris, fickle Paris, was not safe, nor had the *Etats* yet granted his demand to be made Constable. Even his family was not trustworthy and was currying favour with the King. And Spain chose this critical moment to imperil his cause still more with Henri. The Duke had been for some time inciting Savoy to make a new raid upon Saluces and rob France of her last footing in Italy, but he did not imagine that Spain would seize this occasion to support his counsels. Savoy allowed Philip to persuade him, and the tidings of the taking of Saluces was the last drop in Henri's cup of mortification. It clinched, not the fact, but the hour of the death of Guise. Henri recognized his hand in Savoy's feat, and after getting the bad news, his doubts vanished. Before he went to bed that night he had decided to get rid of his enemy.

His next move was characteristic. He had a solemn reconciliation with Guise. At the instigation of the *Etats*, he swore upon the Host at the Altar a "perfect reconcilment and friendship with the Duke, and oblivion of all past quarrels—the which he did most freely and frankly. And furthermore, to content, or perhaps amuse them, he declared that he was resolved to abandon the reins of government to his cousin of Guise and to the Queen-Mother, since he desired to concern himself with nothing except praying to God and doing penance." . . . "But," adds a chronicler of these events, "it was of very different things that he was thinking." None knew this better than Guise, or saw more clearly through his professions. He repeatedly expressed his distrust to Catherine, but she assured him that it was without foundation. She herself,

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she said, would stand surety for his safety in any enterprise in which he chose to embark.

The tyranny of the Ligue increased. Early in December, the condemnation of Navarre as a heretic was mooted in the States-General. Henri told the Assembly that he thought it "neither just nor honourable to condemn the accused unheard. Would it not be better to demand of him, for the last time, to swear to the *Sainte-Union* and to declare himself a Catholic?" The *Etats* responded by pronouncing Navarre to be "incapable of succeeding to any Crown or to any kind of royalty whatsoever," and they added that the King's last proposal was "out of reason."

While Henri doubted and prevaricated, hating the Ligue, yet powerless to resist it, resolved upon the death of Guise, but irresolute about the how and when, fresh fuel was added to his anger. Epernon wrote to him that Guise had brewed a plot against his person; and, what was more significant, Guise's envious relations—his brother, the Duc de Mayenne, and his uncle, the Duc d'Aumale—confirmed the sinister report. Mayenne sent a messenger to warn Henri that the day of fulfilment was near, and Aumale despatched his wife to bring him word that a secret Council had been held to compass an attempt upon his life. The incensed King, spurred by his resentment, felt new impetus to hasten Guise's end. "To put him in prison," he said, "would be to catch a wild boar in the nets. He would probably be stronger than our cord, whereas, if he lay dead, he would trouble us no longer, for a dead man cannot make war." The same day that he spoke these words he held a Council, and there he resolved that Guise should die on the Sunday before the Feast of St. Thomas—at a supper which the Archbishop of Lyons was to give on that evening in his honour.

The date was a good one, for the Queen and many of the nobles were away at a wedding. Yet Henri still lingered, will-less, putting off the moment. One evening as he passed through one of the dark palace corridors, he met a gentleman of the Court. The King stopped him, seized his hand and held it, as if he had much that he would say—then, irresolute, perplexed, he said nothing and went on his way. He was advised for various reasons to postpone the deed, and he was glad of the grace. On the very Sunday when he had purposed to achieve it, he sent for the Maréchal d'Aumont, and for M. de Rambouillet. "Either he or Guise must die,"

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he said, "otherwise life would be intolerable." Rambouillet advised a Trial first. The Maréchal only said, "*Il faut le tuer.*" Henri summoned Crillon and asked him to do the ugly work, but Crillon refused to commit murder. "He would," he added, "be charmed to kill Guise in a duel." The Duke's death was now fixed for the Festival itself. It was the day on which Guise had meant to destroy the King, though, warned that his design had been detected, he had at once resumed his policy of careless inaction. But that Wednesday Henri again let pass. Indeed, great part of it the two men who had intended to murder one another spent together. Guise attended the King at Vespers in the Palace Chapel. He read intently all through the service. "You were very devotional," Henri said when they came out, but Guise only laughed. "His book had been a Huguenot satire against the King—he should advise His Majesty to read it," was his answer. He followed Henri to a garden in the town and there they strolled for some time, side by side. The King talked more affably than usual, but Guise was too disdainful to pretend. He haughtily informed Henri that he could serve him no longer; he had resolved to retire from public life—in other words, he meant to wage a civil war again in France. Henri kept his mask of amiability; he would not take this sudden resignation, the Duke must reconsider the matter. Guise insisted; Henri grew exasperated. Words ran so high between them that the Archbishop of Lyons overheard the insolence of Guise and reproached him later for his disrespect. He ought to speak, he said, more humbly to His Majesty, and gentleness would be more polite. "You are mistaken," answered the Duke, "I know him better than you do; the only way you can have him is by bravado. He is a King who *desires* one to frighten him." His conception of bravado covered much. The next day he sent in his resignation; it was a direct challenge. He probably intended to strike quickly, "for he had," said Estoile, "passed the Rubicon, and was prepared to seize the kingdom at once, after knocking down the pillars thereof." Nor were others unaware of his projects. The Sunday before, some one had applied to him for a passport, a matter which his secretary dealt with. "If there is no great hurry," said the secretary, "I advise you to wait a little. *We shall soon have changed our title and quality.*"¹

¹ The italics are the author's.

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And the secretary spoke the truth, but it was not the truth that he had dreamed of.

It was unfortunate for Guise that, at this crucial period, when her countermining presence was most needed to give check to the King, Catherine had fallen ill and was obliged to keep her bed—for her, an unwonted proceeding. To this disaster the Duke added another—a strange, a fatal blunder on his part. It was of a piece with his arrogant indifference. Careless of the keys of the palace, now in his charge, he neglected the usual precautions. This was on December 21. They fell into the hands of certain people in the palace, “not his friends,” and these it was who finally admitted the men whom the King appointed to perform the deed. That same day Guise held a Council of the Ligue. Its members tried to warn him of his danger. One, Menneville, gave him advice as well: “You must act before he does,” he said. “Menneville is right,” rejoined the Duke, “more right than the rest of you. Still, when I see Death come in at the window, I shall not run out at the door.” He was fully aware of the danger now. He knew that there was mortal combat between him and the King. But he believed in his luck, and snapped his fingers at Destiny.

At any other time he might have been persuaded to elude the present and to leave Blois until the immediate risk was over. Throughout these days his followers had not ceased to implore him to go, and he himself had acknowledged that they were right. Every morning he had promised to depart; every evening he had said, “*Pas encore.*” For a fatal tie bound him to the palace, an overmastering passion for a woman. It was not for the first time that she had played a part in events. Navarre and Alençon had been her victims before Guise. She was none other than the beautiful Madame de Sauves, now Marquise de Noirmoutiers, and it was but lately that she had enslaved the Duke. Yet it was his love for her which made him refuse to stir at this dire moment, and it was with her that he spent his last night on earth, the night of Thursday, December 22.

The hours before he sought her had been full of forebodings. Even while he was sitting at supper, five warnings reached him, each close upon the other. One he found as he lifted his napkin, in a paper hidden beneath it. He wrote “*On n'oseraït*” upon it, and contemptuously threw it under the table. And when his uncle, the Duc d'Elbœuf, entreated him to be on his

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guard because the morrow would bring danger to his person, he only laughed. "He saw," he said, "that Elbœuf had been looking at his Almanac, for all the Almanacs of the year were stuffed full of such threats." One more entreating note came later, while he was with his mistress. "We should never have done if we tried to pay attention to all these," he exclaimed. Then, crumpling it up, he put it beneath his bolster and sent away the messenger who brought it: "Go to bed and let us sleep," he commanded.

Thus, unruffled, he sauntered to his doom. Henri had laid his plans carefully. That night, Crillon himself shut all the palace doors and watched outside them. At midnight, the King took his candlestick and went to bed, giving orders to be waked at four. He had commanded the Council to meet early, and Marchant, the Captain of the Guards, was to stop Guise with a bill for payment as he went to the assembly, and so cut him off from his followers. All happened as the King desired. At four on that dark December morning, he was roused from sleep by a knocking at his door. At first he remembered nothing. "What is that?" he asked a lady waiting near. "Sire," she answered, "it is M. de Halde who says that it is four o'clock." The King had by now collected his wits. "My boots, my hat, and my candlestick!" he said to Prolant, his gentleman. His wife was with him—he explained nothing, and left her bewildered. "Above all," he whispered, "let us make no noise, for fear of awaking my mother." He was pale, haggard, visibly moved. His face looked unhappy. He left his bedroom and met his confederates—as many as forty-five—whom he brought into his Privy Closet. They talked so loud that once more he trembled. "*Voyons*," he muttered, "how many daggers are there?" There were eight. He kept two for himself, and distributed the others. There were hours to wait through before the Council. The forty-five dispersed in silence, but one of them, the Comte de Termes, a relation of Epemon's, stayed with him to see that he did not alter his mind. He need not have been afraid. Henri's agitation meant no change of purpose. He had already confessed, and he intended to have an almoner in the room to soothe his conscience when the crime had been committed. Meantime he tried to soothe himself by the chants of the priests whom he himself had led secretly, by the flickering light of a torch, through dark rooms to his oratory, bidding them pray there for his success—in what enterprise they knew not.

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But he could not control his nerves, and he never ceased to walk up and down, now and again opening the door into the ante-chamber and instructing the Guards, who knew their parts. "Above all," he said, "do not get yourselves wounded; I should be very much vexed if you did." And while her son was pacing, tortured by suspense, Catherine, unconscious for once of all that was going on in the palace, lay ailing in her vast State-bed. Henri's fears had not been fulfilled; the unwonted noise had not awakened her.

The Duc de Guise and the Cardinal had been asked to attend the Council early, but although the rest had long been there, there was as yet no sign of the Duke. The winter's day was dark and covered—it rained that Friday from morning till night—and no one dared wake him till nearly eight. He rose and attired himself carefully in a new grey satin suit, "too light for the season." Did Madame de Noirmoutiers admire it? She kept him for a long time by her side, and their adieux were drawn out and tender. Then, hanging a short cloak over his shoulder, he left her and walked towards the Chamber of Council. "Such a figure as that can defend itself," remarked some one who saw him. Outside, the rough cobbles of the courtyard were shining and wet; the stone passages through which he passed indoors were dank and struck ominously chill. That very morning he had received nine more letters bidding him beware. "This is the ninth to-day," he had said aloud as he put it in his pocket and strolled on in his new satins, "too light for the season." As he neared the short flight of steps leading down into the big Hall, the Captain of the Guards approached him, and, bowing low, but with studied insolence, "in a fashion very different from usual," he held out the bill as had been arranged. Guise courteously stopped to hear him, and, promising payment, moved on. The Captain and his train followed him, their hats in their hands, and made it easier to blind him to the fact that none of his own men were near him. They had been cut off at the entrance as had been planned. But the door of the Council-Hall once shut behind him, everything was changed. The Guards cleared the stairs of pages and valets, and made all safe. Crillon locked the outer doors of the palace. As Guise seated himself and looked round, he read dismay on all the faces about him. The Council had got wind of what was on foot—there was doom in the air. For the first time, Guise showed signs of perturbation; he changed colour; the eye

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next his scar began to water, as it did whenever he was stirred, and he bled at the nose. He sent for a handkerchief. "Monsieur," he said to a gentleman near him, "will you go to the staircase door? See if one of my pages or any one else is there, and ask him to bring me a handkerchief." The gentleman delivered his message, but was not allowed to go back to the Hall. The page meanwhile fetched the handkerchief from the Duke's secretary. Even at this eleventh hour there was an attempt to save him. The secretary tied up a note in a corner of the handkerchief: "*Sauvez-vous, ou vous êtes mort*," it ran, but it did not reach him. The page was prevented from returning, the note was taken from him; only the handkerchief was passed on and was given to the Duke by the King's valet.

Guise had seated himself in the Council. He suddenly turned faint—his face assumed a deathly pallor. "I am cold; light the fire!" he said—and, after a pause, "My heart is failing." But he quickly pulled himself together and asked for "any trifle to revive him—conserve of roses, or Damascus grapes from the King's cupboard." Was there a last note of defiance, or of braggadocio confidence, in demanding restoratives from Henri's medicine-chest? Nothing could be found but Brignoles plums. They were brought and he put some in the little sweetmeat-box that he carried—it was gilt and in the shape of a shell. The business of the Council proceeded.

Meanwhile the King was waiting in his closet in the greatest agitation. "Révol," he said to one standing by, "go and tell Monsieur de Guise to come and speak to me in my *vieux cabinet*." Révol obeyed, but was stopped by an usher in the ante-chamber. He returned trembling. "*Mon Dieu*, Révol!" cried the King, "what is the matter? How pale you are! You will spoil all, you will spoil all for me! Rub your cheeks, rub your cheeks hard, Révol!" His Majesty then gave orders that Révol was to be allowed to pass and to return with Guise. When Révol entered the Council-Chamber, a *député* was speaking upon the *Gabelle*; Guise was eating Brignoles plums. "Monsieur," began Révol, "the King requests your presence; he is in his *vieux cabinet*." His message accomplished, he left the room and rushed back, like one affrighted, to his master. Guise was leisurely. He put a few plums back into his box and threw the rest upon the ground. "Messieurs," he asked, "would anybody like some?" Then rolling up his cloak and taking it, with his long gloves and his sweet-

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box, under his left arm, he prepared to follow Révol. "*Adieu, Messieurs,*" he said as he went off the stage. He knocked at the King's door: the Usher opened it.

Whoever has been in the Château at Blois will remember how he passed to his death. They will recall the grim little doorway to the King's apartments—his *vieux cabinet*, the antechamber adjoining it, the narrow muffling passage leading to his bedroom. As Guise entered, one of the Guards tried to give him a last chance and trod upon his foot. Guise understood, but he knew escape was impossible. The Usher had come out from the King's closet and had shut the door on the inside. Guise made two steps, then took hold of his beard with his right hand and half turned to see who was following him. The Sieur de Montsérine, who was standing by the mantelpiece, advanced and stabbed him swiftly in the left breast. "Traitor, you will die of this!" he called out as he dealt the thrust. The Duke hit out with his sweet-box—the only weapon in his hand. Three other men, concealed behind the tapestry, fell on him at once. "*Eh, mes amis!*" he cried. When one among the rest, called Periac, pierced him, his voice grew louder with a prayer for pity. In his struggle, his sword had got entangled in his cloak, and his legs had been seized. But, with an almost superhuman effort, he dragged himself from one end of the room to another and along the passage to Henri's bedroom, leaving blood-stains in his track. There, at the foot of the King's bed, he fell. "My God, I am dead! Have mercy on me!" he groaned. The words were his last. They were heard distinctly in the Council Hall, and his brother, the Cardinal de Guise, was the first to catch them.

Before the breath was out of his body, the courtiers were plundering it. One took the diamond heart from his ring, another his purse full of gold coins. Round his neck they found a little key on a gold chain, and, in his pocket, a paper. It was a memorandum made for future needs. "Seven hundred thousand livres," it ran, "are needed to maintain the war in France"—a fit summary of his aims—of his existence. He had not yet breathed his last. As some brigand lord was searching his clothes, he gave faint signs of life. "Monsieur," the pious noble said at once, "while you yet possess some spark of life, ask pardon of God and the King." But Guise was past speech. He heaved one hoarse, deep sigh, then he died. They put his grey satin cloak upon him, but they covered the rest of his body with a wretched piece of old carpet, and they

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laid a straw cross upon his breast. As they stood round him, they mocked him and called him "the glorious King of Paris," the nickname His Majesty had given him. Thus they left him, stretched out and stark, for two hours, and his murderer, the King, came to look upon him. "*Ah, qu'il est grand ! Encore plus grand que vivant,*" he exclaimed. Then, growing gay, "*Je suis seul Roi maintenant !*" he added.

Presently he bethought himself of his mother. With feverish haste, he stormed into the room. "Madame, how are you ?" he began. "Only so-so, my son." "But I am very well," he cried, "for I am King of France. I have killed the King of Paris." There was a silence fraught with horror. The shock overpowered even Catherine. "Do you know what you have done, my son ?" she said—"God grant that no ill may come to you !" Then, after deep reflection—"You must lose no time in seizing Orleans, and believe me when I beg you not to fail in sending all news to the Legate." Her concentrated brain made straight for the mark, and she wasted no words in lamentation. None the less, her spirit was broken. In a moment, the work of her life had been wantonly destroyed, and by the hand of the son whom she had worshipped. She had given her strength to bring about peace and to prevent the Bourbon succession ; his act would once again plunge France in civil war, and she saw Navarre, the only real man in France, already on the throne. She had striven to give Henri prestige—he had lost it. She had longed for his confidence—he had taken this awful step without her.

In one thing he obeyed her. Guise had not long been dead when he sent for the Papal Legate, Morosini, and went with him to Mass. On their way they met a follower of Guise. The King stopped to speak to him. "Monsieur," he said, "the Law will now revive ; the tyrant is dead." His speech concealed a threat against all those who had been the friends of "the tyrant."

What had happened all this time in the Council ? When the Cardinal de Guise heard the cry of his brother, sent up "betwixt the strokes of sword and dagger," he pushed back his chair and started to his feet. "That is my brother—they are killing him !" he called out, and made as if he would rush from the Hall with the Archbishop of Lyons. But they were held back. The Marshals of Aumont and Retz stood up, their naked swords in their hands. "Let no man stir, if he does not wish to die !" they shouted. At that moment, both

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Cardinal and Archbishop received a summons from the King. Before they knew what was happening, they were arrested and borne away to their prison—a wretched shed run up a few days before to harbour some Feuillants and Capucins. Here they were kept in confinement without either seat or firing. Perhaps it was on his road there that the Cardinal caught sight of the royal arms with the crowns of France and Poland. "The tonsurer will add a third crown-piece to the scutcheon," was his comment, "and I myself will hold his head between my legs and make his Capucin tonsure with my dagger."

Like all men without a will, when Henri had once begun he could not stop. The Cardinal de Guise was too dangerous to be allowed to live. If he were to die, the sooner, the better. On Saturday, December 24, the day after the Duke's death, Henri heard that the Clergy of the *Etats* had resolved to come and beg His Majesty for the person of their President, the Cardinal, that they might continue their proceedings, and although unmoved in his determination, he was bent on seeming just in their eyes. As sensitive as he was corrupt, in no light does he appear more decadent than in his desire to make his sins respectable. Before committing this second murder, he consulted some experts, creatures of his own, who decided that the crime of High Treason, of which the Cardinal, like his brother, had been guilty, was "worse in so high-placed a prelate than it would be in an ordinary priest, and that the King would have done no good at all if he got rid of one without the other." Upon this, Henri summoned a certain Captain, Gast by name, and ordered him to undertake the murder, but Gast, courageously refusing, His Majesty was forced to employ four bravi, at the price of four hundred crowns. With them he had no difficulty. They climbed the stairs that led into the miserable hovel where the Cardinal lay, and they told him that the King wished to see him. As they marched away with him, his fellow prisoner, the Archbishop of Lyons, prostrated himself before a crucifix and there awaited the end that he felt convinced would come. He was not long left in suspense about the Cardinal, who was massacred at once outside. But his own fate was better than he feared. His nephew, the Baron de Lux, threw himself at the King's feet, and offered his own head as a sacrifice if only his uncle might be spared. For once the King acceded, but he would not grant the Archbishop freedom.

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Lux had chosen a favourable moment. He waylaid the King as he was walking to church. For it was Christmas Eve, and directly Henri had received the reassuring news of the Cardinal's slaughter, he set out for Mass, accompanied by the Cardinal de Vendôme and a retinue of noblemen and gentlemen. By that time he probably figured to himself as the righteous Sovereign to whom God had given the victory. Had not the Almighty always been the miracle-working Partner of Crowned Heads? Henri must have listened to the *Gloria in Excelsis*, sung by his chosen *chantres* on Christmas Day, with a kind of æsthetic rapture. He might now expect peace—for goodwill he did not care—since his enemies were put under his feet. Other men were less blind than he. When the news of the Duke's murder reached the King of Navarre, the tears came into his eyes. Then he looked upwards. "If it be thus," he said solemnly, "then certainly God has judged the cause of the King and of his people—and He has judged my cause also."

Henri had taken care to leave no friend or relation of the Guises who remained within his reach at liberty. The Duchesse de Nemours, her son the Duke, the Prince de Joinville, the Duc d'Elbœuf, all of them now at Blois, were put into prison. So was the aged Cardinal de Bourbon, "my old fool," as the King called him. Catherine, brooding darkly on her sick-bed, was spurred to action by the news of his captivity. A flash of her old energy returned. She sent for her litter, and, weak as she was, had herself carried to him. He, too, was ill and weary. When he saw her, he wept. "Ah, Madame! Madame!" he cried—"These are your deeds! These are the tricks you have played us. Madame, you are killing us all." His words shook the Queen-Mother. Contrary to custom, she showed great agitation. "May God annihilate me, may He damn me," she answered, "if ever I dreamed this crime or counselled it! Far from that, it has broken my heart." My sorrow will be the cause of my death." Her strength failed her. She tottered. "I can no more; I must take to my bed," she said, as she departed. "So she did," says an old chronicler, "nor did she ever rise from it again."

Her hour had struck. We ourselves approach her death-bed with a feeling of awe, with something like terror—the death-bed of an evil generation; of unknown aims and unknown torments; of a life that had hardly known joy; of a Queen who kept secrets that none will now decipher.

THE LATER YEARS OF CATHERINE DE' MEDICI

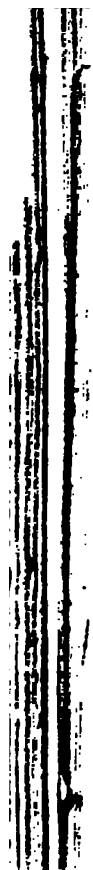
Her death was lonely. It came on January 5, "the Eve of the Feast of the Three Kings." Legend said that the date was fatal to the Medici. It had seen the end of more than one great man of that family. Now it put a seal on her strange life of close on seventy years. "A few of her servants and some of her familiars wept for her—and so did the King—a very little—" Such is the eloquent entry in a diary of the day. "As for Blois," it continues, "where she had been worshipped as the Juno of the Court, she had no sooner given up the ghost than she was made no more account of by any than a dead goat would have been." Never were fewer tears shed for any long-lived woman who had been wife and mother, than fell for Catherine de' Medici.

When Paris was asked to bury her at Saint-Denis, in the grand tomb that she had had carved with her statue by the side of that of her husband, the Council of the Sixteen refused to receive her. If her body were brought there, they said, they would drag it to the banks of the Seine and throw it in. On the Sunday following her end, a great preacher announced that she had died from the pulpit of the Church of Saint Barthélemy—a name strangely fitting his task. "She has," he spoke, "done much good and much evil in her day—more evil, I think, than good. I make no doubt of this. To-day, Gentlemen, a difficulty presents itself. Ought the Holy Catholic Church to pray for one who has lived as badly as she has done—who has so often upheld heresy, though she ended by supporting our *Sainte-Union*? Gentlemen, to this question, I reply that if you will, of your charity, give her now and then a *Pater* and an *Ave*, you may do so. If not, it does not much matter. I leave you a free choice."

Such were the prayers that arose for the Queen-Mother—the prayers that did not much matter. Who could pray for a soul long since dead? Her bones were huddled into a common grave at Blois. Her works alone followed her—a base escort.

CHAPTER XXII

The End of Henri III



CHAPTER XXII

The End of Henri III

WHILE Catherine lay dying, Paris was in tumult. The news of the Duke's murder reached the Capital on Christmas Eve. The people were in church when they heard of it—the officiating priests announced it to them. At first no one would believe that the King was capable of such a deed. When it was found that it was true, there arose a howl of rage and vengeance. The populace swarmed into the streets, they flew to arms; their idol had been destroyed by the hand of the sovereign whom they despised. They spent a strange Christmas—"the Festival was disturbed," says a sober witness of the scene. The first impulse of the mob was to rush to the Hôtel de Guise and to make the stricken Duchess come out to them. She was expecting a child; she had wished it to be born in Paris, and one of the last things Guise had done there was to confide her to the care of its citizens. Weeping and half fainting, robed in trailing black, she appeared before them. Their tears answered hers; with broken voices they blessed her. Madame de Montpensier paraded the town, also in deep mourning. She fell ill from emotion and was obliged to keep her bed. The excitement of the city reached its climax in a great procession—a train of a hundred thousand men, winding along the streets by night, each of them carrying a torch. And, at a given signal, every one put out his light with a "May God thus extinguish the Race of the Valois!" Anarchy reigned supreme, but the anarchists had to disguise it and give it the name of order.

Some mock-government became needful, if only to legalize lawlessness. The Sixteen elected a General Council of the *Sainte-Union*, and the Rule of the Riff-raff began. Madame de Montpensier initiated it by summoning the Sixteen to her bedside. She bade them send for her uncle, the Duc d'Aumale, and make him Governor of Paris. He was a foolish and impotent creature, and only in a time of confusion

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could he have had any authority. He commanded that all the houses of Royalists and *Politiques* should be searched, and the recorder of the fact describes how his own house was rifled first. The broadest ballads about the King were sung; the priests were violent against him. On December 29, a popular preacher had said in his sermon that "*ce vilain Hérodes*"—an anagram on Henri de Valois—was no longer their sovereign. As the congregation streamed out, they tore down the wreathed arms of France and Poland from the West Door, and trampled them underfoot, or threw them into the river. This example was followed in other churches—the passion for destruction was roused. Images were broken in pieces, the Mignons' tombs angrily destroyed. On New Year's Day, the same priest, when the sermon was over, made his vast audience take an oath that they "would give their last farthing, their last drop of blood, to avenge the murder of the two Princes." And in witness thereof, every one there was to hold up his hand. Among them was Jacques de Harlai, the First President of the Parlement, who was popularly supposed to have been the King's accomplice. He was the centre of the proceedings, and the preacher took remorseless pleasure in insulting him. "Hold up your hand, Monsieur le Président," he cried, "hold it up very high, higher still, please, so that the people may see it." And Harlai was obliged to obey, not without great danger to his person.

Henri was repeatedly deposed by the Pope (who also excommunicated him), as well as by the Sorbonne and the Theological Faculty. These two authorities absolved his subjects from their Oath of Allegiance; they told them that they might wage war against him with a free conscience, as against "a most execrable tyrant who had injured the Holy Catholic faith"; and they boldly erased his name from the prayers of the Church. In a short time, whoever mentioned the King in Paris was in danger of his life. And outside it every little village had its Ligue. There was general disintegration.

The Reign of Revolution in the capital was quickly turning into a Reign of Terror. The parties were much the same as in 1792, and the last extreme movement that killed the Ligue was evolved from within, exceeding what had gone before. It swallowed up the Municipality; it absorbed the Militia; while the Prévôt whom it appointed had command of the supplies and the police. Bussy-Leclerc, now Governor of the Bastille, was the moving spirit of the governing Association. One

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day, he suddenly entered the Chamber and arrested several of the leading members. The rest followed them out. Other men belonging to financial courts were taken by force in their houses. The Parlement was, however, too useful a show to be lost. The *Ligueur*, Busson, was made its President; the weaker spirits were restored to their seats and became the tools of the Ligue. And, to crown all, the Royal Seal was broken and new seals were made for the new Government. The whole of France, not for the last time, was groaning—chained in the name of Civil Liberty. The Provinces formed Councils of Sixteen on the Parisian model. Executions were barbarous, chaos spread. At Toulouse, the President of its Parlement was hanged with Henri's portrait behind him. Later, the King's effigy was burnt there, in the public square. In Brittany, two Parlements sat at the same time; one was Royalist, the other of the Ligue.

And alongside this turbid, aimless torrent of death and brutality, great pageants went on as usual. Paris was poverty-stricken—trade had almost ceased. The populace lived from hand to mouth, and mostly upon random alms. Yet the city gave a sumptuous funeral, at its own expense, to Guise—"its tutelary God," as Estoile called him. Then came the christening of his newborn son. Henri had found himself forced to liberate such relations of the Duke as he had imprisoned, and the Duchesse de Nemours was present at the splendid baptism of her grandchild. The show was none the less extravagant because of the mourning. The Guises had not ceased to believe in themselves, and "*la Sainte-Veuve*," as the widowed Duchess was called, did not leave off giving incredible banquets to the Princes and Princesses of the *Union*, while the citizens were starving. She was hardened into inhumanity by her thirst for vengeance, and she delighted in the humiliation of her enemies. One of the things she liked was to stand and laugh at the great ladies whose husbands were in prison, as they went to the Bastille to visit them; "to mend their lords' breeches," as she called it. "She took," she said, "a singular pleasure in seeing them crusted with mud," as, despoiled of their "Chairs" and their coaches, "they trudged on foot through the miry wintry streets."

Yet neither she nor hers felt secure. There was no organization anywhere, and the Ligue could boast neither a trained army, nor a leader to marshal what troops they had. It was Madame de Montpensier who took matters into her hands. Rising from

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her sick-bed, she travelled to Burgundy to seek the Duc de Mayenne. He was the ablest of Guise's brothers, but the most disinclined for power; a big slow man, "a sound but indolent soldier, a cautious politician . . . perhaps too honest" for the work required of him. He was also a thorough aristocrat, full of prejudice against the people. He hated the *Seize* and their demagogues—he loved free-and-easiness and self-indulgence. He would have made a finer general, had he not hampered his movements by carrying a kind of harem with his baggage—a wickedness not unmarked by the Parisians, who fired constant squibs at this military Lothario. He was certainly the best man at hand. Madame de Montpensier spared no effort to drag him forth from his retreat. She brought him a list of the Council of Paris, she pressed him to act as its President, and also as Commander of the Forces. Her energy was rewarded and, on February 15, he entered Paris, through streets thickly lined with crowds, shouting "*Vive le Duc de Mayenne! Vivent les Princes Catholiques!*" He was formally appointed "Lieutenant-General of the Royal State and Crown of France"—"a ridiculous, pretentious title," says a critic of the day, "the which was given him by fifteen or sixteen ragamuffins and confirmed by an imaginary Parlement." One main question confronted all parties. Would the King continue to make Navarre his ally and, supported by him, take the field; or would Navarre hold out against him? The problem was a crucial one. Without Navarre, the King would be easy to defeat. With him, the case would be reversed. But in that case there would be three separate factions making war in France and involving long and bitter discord.

Henri saw but one issue—he made advances to Navarre. "I must defend myself at all costs," he said—"At a pinch I will make use of heretics, or even Turks." But Navarre was not inclined to yield at once. A month after the murder at Blois, he sent for his friend, Duplessis-Mornay, to meet him alone in his palace gallery and hold consultation. He told him that he had constant proposals from towns throughout France, even the Catholic ones; that they were all ready to welcome him. What should he do? Mornay did not wish for war against the King, if Navarre could bring him under without it. He advised him to move towards the royal army, then in the valley of the Loire, and to hem it in between his own troops and those of the Ligue. Once in that position,

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Henri would certainly come to terms, and it would be with his brother-in-law, not with the Ligue, that he would make them. Navarre saw the force of this and assented. He marched towards Tours, where the King was. But Henri had no mind for rapid hostilities. Although he was treacherously negotiating with the Ligue, he despatched envoys to catch Navarre on the way and arrange matters—Mornay's brother, and his own aunt, Madame Diane.¹ As Navarre approached, however, the King came to a definite resolution; he realized the advantages of an alliance with him, the risks of such a union with the Ligue, and he sent him an invitation to come and see him at Tours. Navarre determined to accept it. It seemed as if the die were cast.

Navarre's arrival in the town was inaugurated by another, an unforeseen meeting. Three leagues from Tours, by the river-bank, his army suddenly saw itself confronted by the army of the Ligue. Catholics and Huguenots, the enemies of twenty years, found that they stood looking on each other in friendly silence. They unbridled their horses and let them drink from the same stream. Young Châtillon was among the Huguenots—the true son of Coligny. He, it was said, now did most to bring the two Kings together and restore peace to France.

When Navarre came to cross the Loire, on his way to meet Henri, a follower, dreading Valois treachery, tried to dissuade him. "God Himself has bidden me go and see him," Navarre said gaily—"It is not in the power of man to hold me, for God is my guide and crosses the river with me." He was not unaware of the danger, but he mocked at it with laughing defiance. He dressed himself conspicuously, in a short red cloak which hardly covered the shabby jerkin worn out by his armour; his hose were of a dead-leaf colour, and his hat was crowned by a great white plume which distinguished him from all his companions. Nor would he be protected by an army, as his friends desired. He would only take his retinue of Nobles. With this escort, he started from the place where the Loire meets the Cher, and proceeded towards the Château of Plessis-les-Tours, where the King was to be found.

It was on the last day of April. Henri III had just heard Vespers at the Church of the Minimes and was walking in the Park, when he was told that Navarre was coming. And in

¹ The illegitimate daughter of Henri II and the favourite hunting-companion of Charles IX. She married the Maréchal de Montmorency.

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this Park it was that they met, in a green and shady alley. A great concourse of country-folk had gathered from every side to witness the event ; they thronged the turf, they climbed the trees ; the branches were weighed down by people. The crowd was so dense that for a quarter of an hour the two Kings looked at one another—they saluted—they even stretched their arms each to each, without being able to come together. Thousands of voices shouted "*Vive le Roi ! Vive le Roi de Navarre ! Vivent les Rois !*" The mob increased in loyalty as it shouted. At last it divided, and they met. Navarre fell on his knees. His easy tears rolled down his cheeks, "as big as peas," says a narrator. The King of France wept also—not so much. There was general embracing all round between the Huguenots and the Catholics. The scene was perfect ; the acting consummate. Navarre had quite brought himself to believe in his part. That night, as he withdrew, "After to-day," he said, "I care not by what death I die ; I shall be content, since God has granted me this boon—to look upon the face of my King." The next day he went alone, with only one page, to see Henri before his *lever*. The King was in good spirits, and with reason. He had secured the most brilliant soldier in France—the chances must be for him. Against the Ligue and against Mayenne—who was so heavy that when his horse threw him he required four men to pick him up again—he could pit the most active general in the world—the man who, when he was in the field, could never spare time to wash or dress.

Unfortunately, Navarre had to depart immediately, called away by business in Poitou. No sooner had he gone than the *Ligueurs* took advantage of the fact. Their army lay some little way from Tours. Mayenne had a spy in the King's household through whose agency he and his troops were allowed, one night, to get into the suburb of Saint-Symphorien. Henri, unconscious of their presence, was treacherously brought to the place to look at some Works of Defence there, and would most certainly have been killed had not a certain man, a miller, recognized him by his violet suit. "Sire," he exclaimed, "where *are* you going ? There, just before you, are the *Ligueurs* !" Battle ensued between Mayenne and the King's men, and the Ligue would have won the day, if Navarre, who had not yet gone far, had not heard the report of the combat. He sent recruits at once, under Châtillon, who, arriving that same evening, turned the royal

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fortunes. The *Ligueurs* behaved generously. When the Huguenots first appeared, wearing the white scarf as their badge, the Catholics shouted out encouragement. "Brave Huguenots," they cried—"Retire, you white-scarves! Retire, Châtillon! We bear no grudge against you—only against him who has betrayed you!" But they did not stop the hand of the enemy, and the Huguenots gained the day. The course of the two Kings was victorious. The Ligue was again routed at Senlis, and Henri III arrived in triumph before Paris. The game seemed once more in his hands. Aumale had taken fright and lurked in hiding at Saint-Denis. The *Politiques* were reviving. The Ligue had become alarmed and was dreading another Eve of St. Bartholomew, for the city was turning against it. Nor was this a matter for surprise. The mock-government was revelling in excesses—anarchy had become Pandemonium. Pillage and imprisonment prevailed; profanity polluted the streets. Aumale, the representative of Catholicism, boasted that he had neither confessed nor taken the Sacrament for three years—that he did not intend to do so until he had massacred all the King's followers. Mayenne's army was still cruder and more violent. "To show the world that they had no religion, they forced their parish-priests, at the point of the sword, to baptize (for they used this very word) their calves and sheep and pigs . . . their hens and capons, and to give them the names of carps, trout, soles, turbot, herrings, and salmon. . . . And the sacrilege at the altars, the plunder, the ransoms wrung from poor people, were but their sport . . . the elements that made a good *Ligueur*."

Delirium had taken hold of Paris—the insanity of a degenerate race. The heat made everything worse, for spring had long since yielded to summer, and July was drawing to its close. The processions in the streets grew wilder. Men and women would rise suddenly by night and rush straight from their beds, pell-mell into the streets, to wake their priests and curés out of sleep and force them to lead numbers of them through the town. Great ladies, hardly clothed, or in white shifts, side by side with hysterical noblemen and interspersed with children—the whole train whirling dishevelled onwards—such was a common sight in these dog-days. Sometimes the grandees relaxed their mood and threw comfits at the *belles* as if it were the Carnival. And more often than not, by night or day, the Bacchanalia were gathered round one central figure: that of Madame de Montpensier—dressed in her

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penitential sheet, cut low and trimmed with lace. Crowds came forth to see her, alone, and she it was who set the fashion in processions.

But mirth there was none in their revels: they were the negation of all mirth—the travesty of panic. No man knew what would come next. "In those days in Paris it was dangerous to laugh," writes one who was there . . . "for whoever wore a face that was in the least gay was held to be a *Politique*, or a Royalist. Curés and preachers warned their flocks to beware, and proclaimed that those seen laughing or rejoicing would be seized." Certain women wearing festival clothes on ordinary days were in danger, and a house was nearly sacked because a servant had idly said that she had seen its owners laughing. The city was given up, as it were, to a mad rout of suspicion.

In this place of demoralized indecision, one person at least knew her mind, and that was Madame de Montpensier. She lived in the Rue de Tournon, near the Pré-aux-Clercs, the heart of ecclesiasticism, where churches, monasteries and seminaries crowded the slope. In later days she boasted that it was she who projected the King's murder and prompted the monk, Jacques Clément, to perform it. Clément was a half crazy Jacobin, mocked at by his fellows as "Captain Clément"—a "religious," who had been guilty of some great crime committed in his monastery, and had been told that, to expiate his sin, he must perform some high and holy deed. Madame de Montpensier persuaded him that the murder of the King, the enemy of the faith, would suffice. She not only promised him heavenly rewards, but a more accessible Cardinal's hat; and he, being simple and untrained, believed that a great lady could not deceive. On the evening of July 31, he set forth upon his awful mission.

The King was at Saint-Cloud. While at home the Ligue beset him as a traitor to religion, from abroad the Pope ordered him to release the Cardinal de Bourbon and the Archbishop of Lyons, and, within sixty days, either to appear himself, or else to send a proxy to represent him, before the tribunal of St. Peter. He stood between Scylla and Charybdis—yet, confident of success, he was the last to understand his danger. He was contemplating the seizure of Paris. That same July day, he had been standing at a window looking towards it. "It would be a great pity," he said meditatively, "to ruin and lose such a fine city. All the same, I must get the better of the

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mutineers inside it." Little did he dream that in twenty-four hours the "mutineers" would be his masters, and that he would be lying upon his death-bed.

At eight o'clock next morning, word was brought him that "a monk from Paris" wished to see him. Although he was not half dressed, he grew angry when his Guards tried to prevent Clément from entering. The Parisians, he said, would accuse him of a hostile refusal to receive "*les Moines*," and he insisted on seeing him immediately. The monk entered, a dagger up his sleeve, and, with a deep inclination, said that he had brought the King a note from the Comte de Brienne, then a prisoner in Paris; and that, besides delivering it, he had something to say to him in private. Henri, "never imagining that harm could come from a little sickly, shrinking monk," asked those around him to withdraw to a distance, and, standing apart with Clément, he opened the letter and began to read it. No sooner did he become absorbed, than Clément slipped the dagger from his sleeve, and, aiming straight, pierced him through. The King did not lose his presence of mind. With a wrench of extraordinary strength, he plucked the weapon from his wound and plunged it into Clément's left eyebrow. "Oh, the wicked monk! he has killed me; some one kill him!" he cried with a loud voice. But Clément seemed dazed by his own deed. Unconscious of his pain, he turned his back and stared at the wall. It was the *Procureur-Général* who stepped forward and stabbed him. He fell at the feet of the King, who was upheld by his attendants.

Henri was brought to his bed and there he lay. At first it seemed as if he would recover. Navarre, who was at no distance from Paris, was instantly summoned, and, having seen him, found no cause for grave anxiety. He even wrote to reassure the absent Queen and felt it safe to return to his camp. But that very night, between August 1 and 2, Henri's condition grew worse. He confessed, and he sent for his Nobles. They came into his room. There, before him, he made them swear to acknowledge Navarre as his successor. His religion did not matter, he told them—he was certain to change it at once. Soon after, in the small hours of the morning of August 2, came the end. With the King's last breath he had defied his mother, and his motive was hatred of the Guises. Hatred, indeed, had been the only inspiring force of his life.

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No sooner was he dead than strange doings convulsed Paris. Madame de Montpensier and the Duchesse de Nemours stood on the steps of the Cordeliers' Church and harangued the mob; they hung green scarves round the necks of the people. Clément at once became a martyr. And after his burial his tomb was made a shrine—the most frequented in the capital. The morality that men of that day owned to was worse than the immorality. Where a mad and vicious monk is the saint, and an unhinged duchess the prophetess, current standards must be those of some limbo too undignified for tragedy. The only relief in the whole business is that the last Valois monarch lay dead—that a dynasty, perverse and ungenerous, was at an end. There was little good interred with its bones.

And if Henri III needs an epitaph, the squib-writers of Paris can furnish it.

Jurer dessus son Dieu de maintenir l'Eglise
Et son plus ferme appui, qu'est la maison de Guise,
Les tuer a l'instant; menacer les Docteurs,
S'ils disent vérité; chasser cil¹ qui l'aime,
Pour meurtrir du grand Dieu les plus grands zélateurs,
Sont les rares vertus du Roy Henri Troisième!

So runs a lampoon of those times. We of the present need add nothing to it.

¹ Celui.

CHAPTER XXIII

The End of la Reine Margot



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The End of la Reine Margot

HENRI III, the King of Chaos, and, even so, a discrowned King, left chaos behind him. Chaos and corruption. The Ligue, like every movement begun upon a basis of falsehood, bore in itself the seeds of dissolution. While Henri lived, its warring elements had united against him; and, had Guise still been in the world; with his strong hand he would have overborne all conflicts, and would have ruled in France without delay. As it was, the military faction under Mayenne disagreed with the clerical faction, and the Ligue fell asunder. In the meantime it proclaimed its own King, the Cardinal de Bourbon, as Charles X, and Navarre had to fight his way to the throne through weary months of hardship and of battle. The Cardinal died in 1590, and Henri IV reigned with undisputed claim. But he did not reign in any real security until three years later, in 1593, when he formally embraced Catholicism.

He was a King without a Queen. Marguerite de Valois remained in her confinement at Usson. "If her body," says Brantôme, "was captive, her brave spirit was not, nor did it fail her, but helped her passing well. This is, truly, what a great heart can achieve." "I know," she wrote to him, "that you have always faithfully kept the affection you have borne towards our House—that you still keep it for this remaining spar of a miserable shipwreck. And I feel myself very happy in that fortune has been powerless to efface my name from the memory of my oldest friends, amongst whom you count. I have heard that, like me, you have chosen the tranquil life, and I hold him happy who can adhere to it. For the last five years God has granted me that grace and has lodged me in an Ark of safety, where, thanks be to Him, the storms of all our troubles cannot harm me. And if I still have means to help my friends, and you in particular, you will find me here, well disposed to do so with all the goodwill in the world."

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The choice of "the tranquil life" can hardly be said to have been her own, but she made the best of a dismal fate. She used her endless leisure for reading, for deepening her scholarship; she played upon the lute; a troop of little children made her choir and sang her verses; she took a growing delight in her garden; and she spent hours in writing to her husband.

For directly they lived apart, they became the good friends that they were meant to be. They corresponded, more or less, almost till Margot's death, which was not till 1615. Their letters were on the most disagreeable topics—money and divorce—but no more now than in earlier times could they leave off writing them—they amused one another too much. Both were always racy, and often brilliant, in their wit. And they were on the most affectionate of terms. Sometimes her tone is humble and high-falutin—a sign that she wanted something from him; sometimes it is more familiar.

"I am your creature," she says on one occasion, when in her most grandiloquent vein—"you can make and unmake me, change and form me howsoever you please. Time and experience have imprinted on my soul the wish that this should be so. I cannot enough regret the great misfortune which for years has prevented my offering your Majesty the gratitude which those years have produced in me—gratitude for the exceeding honour which I once had of being near you. Then, when I was over-full of youth and vanity, I had the honour to please your Majesty and gain your praise. . . . Had I but possessed in those days my present sense of thankfulness, I know I should have made myself more worthy of so great and perfect a King."

"You are," she exclaims in another note, "my father, my brother, my King!" The relationship seems complicated enough, even for the Reine Margot. Henri IV responds with "My sister," but his tone is cautious; he knew that her warmth always meant a request for money. If, indeed, she stood to him for anything definable, we should say that she figured rather as his widow—his importunate widow—while he was by no means like her widower. He had some time ere she wrote thus become absorbed in Gabrielle d'Estrées, and his desire was for a divorce that would enable him to marry the amazing woman who kept him faithful (faithful *à la Henri IV*) for fourteen years. He could boast, as we know, abundant ground for his demand. The *Divorce Satirique* (a Huguenot pamphlet, it is true) said that he

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had no less than twenty-six reasons. But Margot fought sturdily against it. All was fair, she thought, in love and war, and her part in the transactions of the six years between 1592 and 1598 shows her at her lowest. She hated the idea of the divorce, she felt she must prevent it at all costs. Her boasted frankness was thrown to the winds. She dallied—she lied—she did all she could to stave off the evil moment. She could not bear the thought of Gabrielle upon the throne—"a defamed baggage like that," as she called her in after days. All the same, she pretended a great love for her; she addressed her as "My sister"; she used her systematically to get money and favours from Henri.

"Pray believe," she writes to Gabrielle, when desirous to gain leave of absence—"that my will conforms entirely to his and yours. I speak of your wills in common, believing them to be so united that agreeing with the one means agreeing with the other. Do not mind my talking freely to you, as to one whom I look upon as more than a sister; whom, after the King, I most honour and esteem. I put so much trust in the assurance you gave me that you love me, that I do not wish to take any other protector when I want to ask anything of *him*. . . . For any request coming from your beautiful lips cannot fail, I know, to be well received.

"Your very affectionate and most faithful friend

"MARGUERITE."

Gabrielle answered her letters in due season; it was easier for her, who was the personage in power. At last, after long negotiations with the Vatican, Henri IV had his desire. Margot was impotent against fate, and, in November, 1598, the divorce was granted, and she was henceforth to figure as no more than the Duchesse de Valois. This was perhaps not the least bitter pill she had to swallow, but she took it with dignity, as she did her husband's letter. For he himself announced her fate to her with unction.

"My Sister," runs his letter—"the Delegates sent by the Holy Father to judge concerning the nullity of our marriage have at last given the sentence we desired, to our common contentment, and I do not wish to put off any longer a visit to you upon this occasion—first to tell you about it, then to assure you of my friendship. Meanwhile I send you the Sieur de Beaumont, on purpose to perform this office; and I have ordered him to tell you, my Sister, that if God has allowed

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the bond of our union to be dissolved, it is because His divine justice has done this for our personal repose, as well as for the good of the kingdom. I desire you to believe that, in spite of what has happened, I shall not cherish and love you less than I did ; on the contrary, I shall show more care than ever for your concerns, and shall make you feel on every kind of occasion that I shall henceforth not only be your brother in name, but also in deed. . . . And I must tell you that I am very much pleased by the ingenuity and candour of your proceedings ; and I hope that God will bless the rest of our days with fraternal love, which, added to public prosperity, will make our lives very happy. So console yourself, I beg of you, my Sister, with the hope of both these joys."

my? Fortune was ironical even to her favourite, Henri IV. A short time after the divorce was determined, and within a few steps of marriage and the throne, Gabrielle d'Estrées died suddenly. She was coming out from a sumptuous banquet, given by a great financier, when death overtook her and put an end to her hopes and fears.

After such a satisfaction to her hatred, Marguerite could afford to be a philosopher, and accept with a good grace Henri's marriage with Marie de Médicis in that same year, 1599. Catherine's daughter had, after all, been trained by Catherine ; she knew that a King must have an heir, and she had no objection—provided his new wife was royal. She was even present at the Coronation that followed the wedding, and sat good-temperedly upon her *tabouret*, as *Fille de France*, while her successor sat upon the throne. Her doing so, we should perhaps remember, implied a trip to Paris and entertainment at the King's expense, but it also implied generosity ; and however topsy-turvy was her virtue, it is impossible not to admire it, and to enjoy her warmth and her large-mindedness amid the sordid waste of meanness which surrounded her. Next year we find her writing to congratulate the pair upon their hope of a child.

"The good, the happy news of the Queen's expectations with which it has pleased your Majesty to honour me will be welcomed by no one with so much joy and pleasure as by me—since I am the person who has most helped to bring this about." She has come, it is observable, by now, to regard the divorce as her own doing. It is Marie de Médicis who answers her.

"My Sister," she says, "most gladly did I receive the

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offer of your goodwill . . . and I pray you to rest in such assurance of mine as your near relationship demands, no less than the affection which I know that my lord the King bears towards you."

Marguerite continued her attentions. She showered kindness upon Henri's children. "Gaston has just appeared upon the scene; the songs of triumph lasted all the day," she wrote joyfully when the second Prince was born. And it was the Dauphin whom she made her heir: she left him all the property she had.

Her great pleasure lay as ever in the King, whom she saw from time to time.

"Yesterday evening," says a note of 1603, "I entirely lost my fever and I feel no remains of my cruel illness. They have bled me so much that I think that when next I have the honour to kiss your Majesty's hands, you will take me for a skeleton—indeed, at this moment, my nose is as long as the nose of the King, my grandfather."

Unfortunately their intercourse was not always as agreeable as her letters. Money-troubles pursued her and those who dealt with her. It belongs to her species to be always impetuous. She was extravagant, she was quarrelsome, she lived in an atmosphere of lawsuits. And she always played the part of injured innocence—a rôle which covered much indelicacy. It is more than likely that she also had her wrongs; that Henri not only kept a tight hand on his purse, but defrauded her of what was hers by right.

"Good God!" she writes in 1603 to a friend, "must one have such trouble to keep what is one's own? Really, this kind of persecution has lasted long enough. I have been ill from anger at two answers that I had from the King—they are so far removed from justice, and from the support that His Majesty promised he would give me to help me keep all my property."

Three days afterwards she writes in a very different style to Henri.

"Monseigneur," she humbly begins, "to you alone I have yielded all, as to my superior to whom I owe all. To those to whom I owe nothing, I yield nothing. To your Majesty I have yielded that which among human beings is esteemed the most excellent thing: I mean greatness. And I have not done this for lack of courage or of knowledge, but because of the exceeding affection which I bear towards your service.

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But as for that which has remained to me as the sign of your goodwill—the declaration which it pleased you to make me in lieu of my marriage-contract—it is not in the power of any living creature, not even of your Majesty, to whom I would refuse neither my blood nor my life, to make me yield a jot of it."

She was probably harassed by debt, but she saw no way to get rid of her old worries except by creating new ones. Was it now, was it earlier, that her faithful friend, the touching little Dowager-Queen, Elizabeth of Austria, came forward and "knowing her to be in great extremities and dearth . . . and almost abandoned by her own blood . . . sent some one to offer to her freely all that she herself possessed." Margot accepted "the half of her revenue, and Elizabeth shared it with her as if she had been her sister." "And, in truth," says one who knew them, "she (Elizabeth) greatly believed in her, and so dearly loved and honoured her that she could not endure her death as the world would have her endure it, but kept her bed for twenty days and there wept bitterly, alone." The poor unloved woman had surely felt sunned by Margot's warmth. And Margot returned her affection. Brantôme remembers seeing her with a little volume in her hands that Elizabeth of Austria had written. It was an account of the events that had happened in her time in France, and it must have included the Eve of St. Bartholomew. The two Queens shared an awful heritage of memories that made them belong to one another. Nor was Margot fickle to old days, or ungrateful to those who helped her in her straits.

Meanwhile her lot had changed and she lived no more shut up at Usson. She still intrigued—she always would have done so—but her intrigues were now comparatively harmless. In 1605, she went to Villers-Cotterets, and thence paid a visit to Henri IV. She begged his permission to go and live at Boulogne. The climate there suited her, and "the habit of repose that she had contracted in her nineteen years' seclusion would prevent her, once having found good air, from ever wishing for a change." So she told him, and, no doubt, she believed what she said. "She would be very glad," she added, "to be where all her actions could be known." Her ambitions, she declared, went no farther than this place of her desires. Henri consented. In one month she was back again in Paris and the centre of plots and of lawsuits. They may have been a wholesome vent for her fighting instinct. One day, while she was attending Mass at the Church of Saint-Séverin, news was brought her

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that she had gained her case—it was only one of many. She left immediately, almost running from the church—only to go to that of the Cordeliers. It was there, in particular, that she wished to have a *Te Deum* sung as thanksgiving for her victory—a kind of formal receipt to the Almighty for His legal skill on her behalf. For the rest, she lived a literary life. She now had a Hôtel in Paris—a forebear of the Hôtel Rambouillet. For here she held what was very like the first of the French Salons. Poets, wits, distinguished spirits of all sorts, surrounded her. A friend of Balzac was her secretary, and Vincent de Paul was, in early days, her almoner. Tales of her generosity had reached him and attracted him to her, nor was he disappointed. To this new home of hers there came, too, the King, to enjoy the music she made for him; perhaps also her sumptuous banquets. And, doubtless, fresh lovers came there too, but they ceased to be important.

Outside her own four walls, her Paris did not treat her handsomely. She was mocked at by the populace; it lavished lampoons upon her. But she passed them over with indifference. She never showed herself more of a great lady than in the scorn with which she met the people's insolence.

Presently she set to work to build herself a palace. It was in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, not far from the Pré-aux-Clercs. Her last years were spent in building, and in planting the gardens which delighted her. Her old sense of magnificence returned—but her ill-luck followed her. She was chased away from her new quarters by the plague, and, for a while, she left Paris. At first she retired to Issy, to mature her plans for the future. She was in nowise cast down; her high spirits never deserted her and, from her retreat, she despatched her usual sheets to Henry. She sent him, she said, "the bulletins of her vagabond fortunes, just to see if she could make him laugh." We need have little doubt that she succeeded. But country delights were not for her and directly she could she returned to Paris.

She had inherited her mother's energy, and she had a sanguine temper all her own. Once more life began for her afresh in a palace on the left bank of the Seine, and here she spent her last hours in this world—which was so peculiarly hers. Her neighbourhood to the Pré-aux-Clercs was not without results. Her remaining days were divided between "devotion" (a most showy observance) and the pleasures of "a mundane retreat."

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She was sixty-two years old when she died, on March 27, 1615. Old age had not touched her spirit. She had not lived well, but she had lived. She was a force in her day. The only generous member of her family, she is also the only one who has left a mark upon the world. Her memoirs survive—her modern, racy mind lives in them. Even now her vitality transmits itself. She brought a note of nature into a close exotic atmosphere, a rush of sunshine into a stifling room. She dwelled in the Abbey of Thelema, and Rabelais should have written her epitaph. Perhaps he has already done so. "*Fais ce que voudras*" should stand large upon her tomb.

CHAPTER XXIV

Conclusion

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SO died the last of the children of Catherine de' Medici, and the one in whom father and mother were most curiously blended. Marguerite had been more beloved than the rest. Brantôme and Elizabeth of Austria were no Court comrades, no fine weather company—they had hearts and they gave her affection. But her other near relations were signally friendless. And this, although her two royal brothers left wives who mourned them.

Louise de Lorraine cared even more for Henri III than Elizabeth of Austria for Charles IX, and was not ashamed to show her feeling. "Nothing moves her as does her husband's presence," says a Venetian envoy, "she keeps her eyes fixed upon him like a lady deep in love." To please him, although she hated dress, she would "load herself with jewels and put on gorgeous garments, or make herself his slave at table." But, "to tell the truth," concludes the Ambassador, "he takes but little count of her." Yet there she was, the only soul to weep for him. It was strange that he of all men should have had a saint to wife, such a saint, indeed, that she gave all that she had in alms, and once found herself unable to bestow a fitting present upon a messenger, because she had not enough left and "did not know where to get it." She and Elizabeth of Austria were like other saints in other days; bad men possessed a strong attraction for them, and they loved their husbands, more, perhaps, than if they had been gentlemen of virtue.

What tears flowed for him elsewhere were merely the tears of courtiers. There was but one of his Mignons left, and that was Epernon. After the death of Joyeuse, all Henri's foolish favours were concentrated upon his single head. His wealth was monstrous; so was his position. Yet he deserted his master and went over to the *Politiques*. It seems hardly needful to add that he did not join them for the sake of any

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principle. After Henri's death, he veered round again and reverted to orthodox Catholicism. He furnished one more proof that we may judge a man by his friends. The Mignons are the acutest condemnation of Henri III, the worst of the Valois.

It is when we turn to Catherine de' Medici that we come to the most friendless of her family. Even in death men refused her hospitality, and only many years later did Paris consent to allow her bones to be buried in the tomb that she had built for them. She died weary, weak, deserted, deep in debt—every aim that she had made for defeated, every feeling that she had cherished crossed and thwarted—the most sincerely hated woman in Europe. She had really loved but twice in her life : first the husband who had never cared for her ; then the son who repaid her devotion by a cold and unrelieved brutality. She had had sorrows ; she had the sense of her own solitude. " I am so much accustomed never to possess an unspoiled joy," she wrote some five years before her death, " that it does not seem so strange to me as it would do to another. . . . God will be pitiful to me who have lost so many. He will not let me see more of them die. That is what I pray of His mercy—and that He will allow me to depart, as befits my age."

It is impossible not to feel compassion for her, and yet our very compassion is mixed with dust and wellnigh chokes us in the parched and arid atmosphere surrounding her. More than three centuries have gone by since Catherine died. Why does she still affect us, who can see her more clearly, just as she affected her generation ? "*Dance de Cimetière*," "*Chaine de Crimes dite*," "*Haine et Discord*," "*Circe d'Enfer Ameine*," were among the current anagrams of *Catherine de Médicis, Royné de France*. The hatred of her as a Florentine, a foreigner, sharpened public abuse ; posterity, with no such added grievance, would nevertheless endorse these witticisms. And yet there are allowances to be made for her greater than is usual. The nursling of scheming Popes and their relations, the centre of heartless ambitions, she never knew what the word love meant. The fervour of self-interest was the warmest feeling that she got from the people about her, and political feuds polluted the air round her very cradle. That she would have responded to something more human is shown by her unforgetting gratitude to the Nuns of the Murate in Florence, among whom, as a little girl, she found shelter from outer

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storms for the happiest two years of her life. During the rest of it, she never ceased to write to them ; and she helped them, not only by large gifts, but by taking the trouble to beg for them while they were in a time of deep distress. After she left them, ill-luck followed her. Her first romance was blighted, there was no one whom she could call friend ; and when, starved for affection, she came, a bride of fifteen, willing to offer it to her French bridegroom, she was met first with sullen rebuff, and then with lifelong infidelity. Forced to live with her rival as her intimate, to mask hatred and jealousy, to see her children brought up away from her, to watch Diane steal motherhood from her as well as wifedom, to find herself detested by the people, caballed against at Court—this was the unenviable destiny of Catherine de' Medici.

And she had no help against it. Perhaps the only true friend she ever had was her father-in-law, François I, and to him she showed a grateful attachment. As long as he was there to need her quick-witted companionship, her life was tolerable. She remained faithful to his memory. In imitation of him she refused to make society exclusive, inviting all kinds of people whom other monarchs shut out from their circle. She used to regret the jovial days of his reign, when talk was good and no ill was imputed. That he, François, trained her mind and manners was among the few blessings of her lot. But when he died, she was more alone than ever. Her regency for François II was an endless web of plot and falsehood ; her stewardship for Charles IX and Henri III, a struggle for breath as she stood between two remorseless parties—a misery of bloodshed, war, and vengeance. "What could a poor woman have done," said Henri IV to a severe critic of Catherine, "with her husband dead and five little children on her hands, while two families were striving to seize the throne, our own and the Guises? I am astonished that she did not do even worse."

Correro, the Venetian envoy, thinks the same. "I do not say," he writes, "that she is a Pythoness or an infallible woman. I will even confess that, at times, she trusts too much to her own good sense ; but what Prince, however wise and valiant, would not have lost his head when he found himself in the midst of such a war, unable even to distinguish his friends from his enemies, obliged to make use of such people as were there—all of them self-interested, and some of them but little to be trusted?" And yet there was no one to recognize her difficulties. "She is a foreigner," exclaims the same authority,

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"and so if she gave the very kingdom, men would only say that she gave what did not belong to her. Every single resolution of peace or war which has not pleased the nation has been laid at her door." Most contemporaries, even hostile ones, did her the justice to recognize her main purpose. "The Queen-Mother pursued peace with a strong step," comments the diarist, Hâton, "and to achieve it she has gone to and fro, now to one, now to another. Throughout the length and breadth of France, men said that she alone bore fire and water, peace and war, in her hand." And Tavannes adds his testimony. "Neither the Huguenots nor the Ligue could move an inch," says he, "without her." Nevertheless, her influence failed to tell. She used to cry when, in later years, she spoke of the way in which, if her advice had but been taken, the civil wars might have been avoided. Her death made the truth of this more plain. Even the people acknowledged it. "We have no Queen-Mother now to make peace," they exclaimed, after she had gone.

Yet this quest for peace, fine though it was, leaves us cold. We admire her energy—we distrust her. The courageous journey is spoiled by the goal it made for. It was not the welfare of the kingdom for which she strove; she fought to establish that balance of power which ensured her own safety. "The Huguenots" (again we quote Correro) "say that she has deceived them by fine words, and by her air of mendacious kindness; while, all the time, she was weaving their destruction with the Catholic King. On the other hand, the Catholics declare that if she had not encouraged the Huguenots, they would never have dared to go so far." To fall between two stools is an ignominious performance, whatever the reason for falling, and compromise, to be a noble game, must be played for a big motive. Catherine fell for the sake of a selfish policy, and her motive was the lust for sovereignty. Her hard fate would have required abnormal qualities to overcome it. Kings and Queens have been as mean as she was, and with less excuse. Why is it that we feel so disinclined to show her mercy?—that in these days of whitewash and easy-going width, we can muster no sympathy to warm us, no compunction for the woman or the Queen? The answer hardly lies in her crimes. The greatest of them, that of St. Bartholomew's Eve, was forced upon her by fear; the rest by political necessity. By her actions, as such, the problem will not be solved. It is because they are symptoms

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of mortal malady, of something that lies deeper than themselves, that they fill us with horror of their author ; and if we would account for our feeling, we must probe deeper, until we reach the seat of the mischief.

Catherine's malady was negation. Her baleful distinction in the world of history is that she was nothing positive. Her work itself rang hollow ; she went about crying peace where there was no peace ; she took the shadow for the substance, the moment for the age. Her very vices meant lack of impulse ; her cruelty, lack of humanity ; her violence not passion, but the want of it. And it is the same with her virtues. Her largeness was equivalent to slackness ; her kindness implied an absence of discernment, a sense that nothing mattered, a contempt for human nature. At highest, it amounted to benevolence ; at lowest, to a lazy good-nature. And so with her boasted serenity ; like others, before and after her, she confounded philosophy with indifference, and she hated enthusiasm.

Catherine was never immoral in the strict sense of the word, but, again, her morality was not purity ; on the one side, it stood for a dearth of instinct and of warmth, on the other, for a dislike of excess—a natural caution—a taste for etiquette. About virtue she did not care at all ; but, with other cynics, she cared greatly for appearances, and her cult of respectability became her superstition. Nor did she like the corruption of good manners ; her court was a school for behaviour.

Elizabeth of England, though as outwardly severe, was by no means as respectable as Catherine. That " courageous and *non-enduring* woman," as her " dear sister of France " called her, had vanity to keep her human. It was a quality which also made her pettier than Catherine, who had no spark of such a failing. Elizabeth was positive enough in her nature, but she shared the sceptical temperament of the Humanists. Catherine's toleration was no more significant than her honesty. It sprang from laxity, incapability of conviction. It was not like that of Elizabeth, who, although indifferent as to creed, believed that the art of government consisted in holding the balance. Catherine's coldness merely used religions as political pawns in the game of maintaining personal power. It might even be said that she did so more treacherously and at a greater cost than Elizabeth, for she began with—and perhaps carried to her grave—a stronger intellectual taste for Protestantism than belonged to her fellow Queen in England. And Eliza-

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beth, at least, had faith in practical ecclesiastical Reform, while Catherine took refuge in observance. She hardly touched the morals of the priests, but she was increasingly rigorous about attendance at Church, decreeing that such gentlemen and ladies as did not perform their Easter devotions should be at once expelled from the Court. The enactment was probably a bid for money from the Clergy—a means to curry favour with the orthodox. And here again she is a contrast to Elizabeth. The Englishwoman was unscrupulous enough, but she had one end—national greatness. To reach it, every means seemed fair in her eyes, but when she gained it it was not for herself. Catherine was all means and no ends. She walked as the moment prompted, with no big centre to focus her outlook and lend grandeur to her falsehood. There was nothing to give unity to all her scattered efforts, hopes and fears.

Perhaps it was the want of this point of concentration which made her so full of vacillations, alternating with fool-hardy rashness. Tavannes dwells on her "imprudence and her dilatoriness." "She embarks," he says, "without any ship-biscuits. She is more astounded than those she wishes to astound. She has deceived some and has been deceived by many." An impersonal aim would have steadied her and cleared her vision.

Her rashness looked like courage; her energy like public spirit. Often they were what they appeared. Physical pluck never deserted her. She would plunge into danger in the trenches, "like any of her Captains." "Why should she spare herself more than they did," she said, "since her spirit was quite as high as theirs?" And she was capable of an imperial boldness towards a laggard in the race. A retired politician tells how one night she suddenly appeared, closely veiled, at his country-house, to force him back to public life. "It ill behoves a good citizen," she cried, "to sit at his ease, shut up in his study and his garden, while outside a hurricane is blowing—the whirlwind of a nation's storm." But her moral initiative was rare; she had no source from which to draw decision.

She was a cynic. She had but one tense—the present. The past she wiped out as inconvenient; the future she did not believe in. She never saw things as they might be; she saw them as they were—as less than they were—and so, missing possibilities, she missed truth. Greatness would, for her,

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have been impossible, because ideas were non-existent in her eyes. She made the fundamental blunder of a low-strung mind—she mistook prudence for wisdom. There are sayings scattered up and down her correspondence—so proverbial as to be almost of the people, so crafty that a Court alone could inspire them—which contain the essence of her shortsighted insight, her limited shrewdness. Three or four such will sufficiently reveal her: stray gleanings from her manifold letters.

It is better to desire what one *can* do until one can do what one desires.

A drowning man grasps at anything, even at a serpent.

Fill a man with fine words, for you must make every one leave you well-contented.

There is no person so clever but that you can surprise him by some trick that he has not dreamed of heretofore.

The harvest from such seed was the Ligue—and the Ligue was the counterpart of Catherine. We have compared it to the great French Revolution, but there is this vital difference between the two. The Revolution was the conflagration at the birth of an Idea; it was the beginning of an era. The Ligue was a bonfire of rubbish, of wretched cabals that meant nothing. Were it to the devil himself they could have been of no import. Dust they were and to dust they returned, leaving no trace in the world, for good or evil.

The death of Catherine closed an epoch; with her died the age of the Renaissance. And with the reign of Henri IV there came the dawn of modern times. But how much of the modern spirit is grounded upon the all-important sixteenth century is a wellnigh incalculable problem. We are the heirs of that fructifying period; its sap flows fresh in our veins, and each one of us is based more or less upon the Renaissance and the Reformation. Some—Puritans, Reformers, zealots, Calvinists, "with (or without) a God"—partake wholly of the Reformation. Others—Hedonists, pedants, Materialists, pursuing knowledge or pleasure as an end—divorced from life, or else too much absorbed in living—feed upon the Renaissance alone. Either extreme is mistaken, either crippled when apart from the other. Both movements are but symbols of two main currents of human nature which found voice at that time of the world's history: the need for true enjoyment, the need for true belief; the aspiration of the mind towards achievement, and of the spirit towards the unachievable. The cur-

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rents are widely diverse, often opposed in their course. And yet, although for long men did not know it, they were—are—making towards a common goal and using a common watchword. That watchword, that goal, is freedom. On the one hand, men threw off the shackles of tradition and the Scholiasts; on the other, of priestcraft and ecclesiasticism. Both resolved to do without middlemen, and to look at Truth face to face.

Such was the permanent part, the enduring living soul, of those two great movements of man's thought. But they had a mortal body also, subject to corruption and to accident. More subject to corruption than other bodies, since the germs of decay which these bore within themselves were invisible, and the semblance that concealed them was enchanting and full of intellectual glamour. It was the destiny of Catherine de' Medici to imbibe the poison of either influence. She was the daughter of the sixteenth century; of Renaissance and Reformation, in the worst sense of the words. From the Reformation she derived its abuses—its degradation of religion into politics—its gross polemic materialism, the more pernicious for priestly vestments. From the Renaissance she inhaled its stagnant Paganism—its cold curiosity—its stupid blindness to aught but the senses—its foolish worship of a golden calf set up in a boundless wilderness. Such were the miasmatic fumes that she absorbed, and breathed forth again to blight the world she lived in. There are deadlier poisons than those that lurk in perfumed gloves; there is a deadlier death than that which these deal to men. It is the death of the ideal; of faith in man; of faith in anything outside him. These were the real murders of the woman accused of scores of others. History provides no theological text for the sermons of conscientious moralists, but sometimes, unconsciously, it reveals to us certain moral laws. It is a medium for them, not a pulpit. If any person, any age, is doomed for its sins to forfeit the meed of immortality, that age is the reign of the last Valois—that person is Catherine de' Medici.

SUMMARY OF HISTORICAL EVENTS FROM 1562—1589

KINGS OF FRANCE

CHARLES IX (1560-1574)
Married Elizabeth of Austria.

HENRI III (1574-1589)
Married Louise of Lorraine.

CONTEMPORARY SOVEREIGNS

POPES. PIUS IV (1559-1566). PIUS V (1566-1572). GREGORY XIII (1572-1585). SIXTUS V (1585-1590).
EMPERORS OF AUSTRIA. FERDINAND I (1556-1564). MAXIMILIAN II (1564-1576). RUDOLF II (1576-1612).
SPAIN. PHILIP II (1556-1598).
ENGLAND. ELIZABETH (1558-1603).

- 1564. Treaty of Troyes with the English—Catherine and Charles IX start on their journey through France.
- 1565. Catherine meets her daughter, Elizabeth of Spain, and holds an interview with Alva at Bayonne.
- 1565-6. Return journey—Attempt at a public reconciliation between the Guises and Coligny.
- 1567. Second religious war breaks out—Flight of the Court from Meaux (threatened by Condé) to Paris—Battle of Saint-Denis—Death of the Constable, Anne de Montmorency.
- 1568. Peace of Longjumeau—Coligny and Condé flee to La Rochelle.
- 1569. The Huguenots defeated at Jarnac; Condé killed—Battle of Moncontour and defeat of Coligny.
- 1570. Peace of Saint-Germain.
- 1571. Coligny comes to Court—Negotiations between the King and the Netherlands.
- 1572. Operations in the Netherlands begin—Jeanne, Queen of Navarre, comes to Blois—Transactions for the marriage of her son, Henri, with Marguerite de France—Death of Jeanne (June)—Marriage of Henri de Navarre and Princess Marguerite (August 18)—Murder of Coligny and Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Eve (August 23-24)—Civil War breaks out again.
- 1573. Siege of La Rochelle—Peace of La Rochelle—The Duc d'Anjou elected to the throne of Poland—Negotiations for the marriage of Alençon with Queen Elizabeth.

SUMMARY OF HISTORICAL EVENTS

- 1574. The plots of Alençon and Navarre, of La Mole and Coconnas, against the King—Death of Charles IX—Continued transactions for English marriage—Return of Henri III; his marriage—Death of the Cardinal de Lorraine.
- 1575-6. Escape of Alençon from the Court—Marguerite de Navarre's plots—Escape of Navarre from the Court—Insurrection of both Princes, allied to Condé—March on Paris—Paix de Monsieur (April, 1576)—States-General at Blois—Catholics in the ascendant.
- 1577-8. War breaks out—Paix de Bergerac (September)—Alençon accepts advances from the Protestants and anti-Spanish Catholics in the Netherlands—Marguerite de Navarre goes there to reconnoitre—Alençon arrives there and is recognized as their Prince—Consternation of French Court at Alençon's independent action.
- 1578. Ascendency and quarrels of the Mignons—Creation of the Order of the Saint-Esprit—Catherine starts on her journey of Pacification with her daughter, Marguerite.
- 1579. Conspiracy of the Maréchal de Bellegarde—Catherine succeeds in pacifying the South—Alençon retires from the Netherlands—Goes to England.
- 1580-1. Civil War again in France—*Guerre des Amoureux*—Peace of Fleix (November, 1580)—Agreement between Alençon and the Anti-Spanish party in the Netherlands—His expedition there—His second visit to England (1581).
- 1582. Alençon in the Netherlands again—Catherine puts forth her claim on Portugal and sends a fleet to support it—It is defeated off the Azores.
- 1583. Alençon's bad conduct towards the Netherlands—His reckless attack upon Antwerp and the disaster that followed (Folly of Antwerp)—His inglorious retreat from the Netherlands, where he had accomplished nothing.
- 1584. Alençon's death—The Prince of Orange is murdered in the Netherlands—First beginnings of the *Ligue* of Paris.
- 1585. Prominence of the *Ligue* throughout France. Publication of its great Manifesto—Treaty of Joinville, between the Guises, the Cardinal de Bourbon and Spain—Henri III refuses the offers of the Netherlands—Paix de Nemours.
- 1586. Protestants of Europe under Christian of Denmark co-operate with Navarre—Henri III forced into temporary alliance with Guise and the *Ligue*.
- 1587. *Guerre des trois Henri*—Navarre defeats the King's army under Joyeuse at Coutras—Joyeuse is killed there.
- 1588. Guise comes to Paris in spite of the King's prohibition and organizes the revolt of the *Ligue*—The Day of the Barricades—The flight of the King to Chartres—His negotiations with Guise and submission to the *Ligue*—Henri III summons the States-General at Blois—His murder of Guise and of his brother, the Cardinal de Guise—"Reign of Terror" in Paris.
- 1589. Death of Catherine de' Medici—Continued Revolution in Paris, with Mayenne as military leader of the *Ligue*—Reconciliation of the King with Navarre—The King intends to take Paris—Murder of the King by Clément, a Jacobin monk.

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